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THE

MYSTERIES OF LONDON;

OR,

Lights and Shadows

OF

LONDON LIFE.

This is by E. L. Blanchard.

308583

by Thomas Miller

author of Royston Gower, Fair Rosamond

Lady Jane Grey. Godfrey Malvern.

THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON;

OR

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF LONDON LIFE.

PRELUDE.

AGAIN the curtain has descended on the characters that have figured in our former histories, and again we raise it to disclose others that have yet to appear before the eyes of those who watch our onward progress.

The many-coloured phases of metropolitan life are like the pictures presented to us in the kaleidoscope—endless in their mutations, and inexhaustible in their variety.

Each turn of the glass brings with it a fresh change; and we have thus an illimitable source of supply.

The same passions—love, avarice, pride, jealousy, envy, lust, and ambition—are ever at work in the breasts of mankind; and the same impulses towards good or evil are ever existing to produce the same effects.

But from these arises a diversity in detail that can never be fully wrought out.

Each day that the world revolves upon its axis—although the elements of its condition are unchanged—the objects on its surface are thrown into new combinations, and the material of society resolved into fresh forms.

Hence will it be seen that our subject is exhaustless.

We have but glanced at a few pages of the great book of human nature. There is remaining for perusal a volume teeming with greater interest than any that has yet been given.

Let not those, therefore, who have accompanied us thus far, now withdraw from our companionship in the

belief that there is nothing left to be delineated, nothing further to be known. We have been hitherto as one who, threading the passages of a vast labyrinth, has still left unpenetrated the mysterious centre of the maze—that wondrous *arcanum* wherein are enshrined the most startling secrets of society.

If the intricacy of the path, and the sinuous windings we were necessitated to pursue, have occasionally led to our divergence from the direct line, the alluring avenues opening to us on our way, and revealing scenes of contrasted light and shade, wealth and wretchedness, vice and virtue, were necessary to be first portrayed in order to prepare the reader for the more occult revelations that are to follow.

We are now upon the threshold of the mystery itself.

CHAPTER I.

THE MESSAGE OF THE LIGHTNING.

A quick stab—a sudden thrust—the sharp trampling down of green branches over the dark pit dug in the forest glade, and the red light of the sunset of a summer eve falls upon the shrinking arm of a murderer. No eye but that ever watchful One that fills the broad blue canopy of heaven has been a witness to the deed—the victim lies deep amid the tangled fern and brushwood of the lonely copse; no pathway traverses that dreary region; the chance is but slight that a straggling footstep will ever press the ground where the dead man lies; and the murderer, throwing the last of the crackling boughs athwart the blood-stained spot, laughs to scorn the inward whispering of conscience, that the body may yet be found, and retribution follow. A mile more in the moonlight, and he is far away from the scene of his crime. The words "Good night!" fall thick and harshly from his parched lips as he exchanges salutations with the sturdy waggoner who is driving homeward to the farm his laden team; and he reaches with chuckling confidence the wayside station of the railway that stretches its metallic arms far away through the gloom, linking the metropolis in its iron grasp. The approaching train is to him the hoped for ark of safety; another moment, and he is borne, with the speed of the wind, leagues away from the decaying human form, now cold and clammy in the night-dew, that he struck down in the evil hour of avarice and passion. But the avenging instrument of Heaven's vengeance and man's triumph has been at work. Whilst he hugged himself in the belief of future safety, the lightning-tongued messenger of the wires has blazoned the infamy of the criminal a hundred miles away; and even then, whilst he is wavering on the bestowal of his ill-got gain, the officers of justice are waiting to receive him. The electric spark has kindled a beacon on his track that lights him to destruction.

At the rattle of the wires in the wind the note-forger, flying from the consequences of his guilt, shrinks aghast at the reflection, that in those trembling links of subtle power the tidings of his fate may be already borne; and, with discord in his ear, the vibration sounds like the jingle of the handcuff. The fugitive from home, who, with trusting hopes and fluttering heart, has yielded to the fond persuasion of her secret lover, sees, with a timid, tearful glance, those threatening tell-tales of her half-repented error. Thoughts that become words, and then travel with the speed of thought itself, are winged to their destination ere the breath has scarcely gone that uttered them. All that brings joy or sorrow, profit or loss, happiness or misery, finds here a rapid and ready medium of transmission—ever eloquent with its unseen agency, and annihilating time and space with its co-etaneous revelations.

Thus, in the eventful night on which our story opens, a telegraphic message was being transmitted through that secret and silent channel, which, had it been known to the railway travellers that it outstripped in its wondrous flight, would have paled the cheek and quailed the heart of many. So deeply, however, was its import veiled in mystery, that those who sent and those who received it were alike ignorant of its signification. It consisted of a series of letters and numbers that manifestly could be only deciphered by those who had the clue; and these private signals were thus combined:

"G. 8. A. M. 2. 5. R. B. W. 9. D.
"*Liverpool to London.*"

There were consequently eleven distinct items, numerical and alphabetical, in this combination, each of which had a corresponding and definite meaning.

The startling intelligence thus conveyed the progress of our narrative will reveal.

* * * * * *

A few minutes before ten on a fine evening in the beginning of June, 1846, there was gathered round the Euston-square terminus of the North Western Railway an unusually large concourse of persons awaiting the arrival of the up-train from the north. Rumours of an accident on the line had been general throughout the afternoon; and from the train not having arrived at the usual time, the anxiety of those who were expecting their friends by this conveyance had grown to an alarming apprehension for their safety.

Whilst the crowd, busily occupied in discussing the probable accuracy of the reports that had been vaguely disseminated amongst them, were pressing still more closely against the barrier, a young girl, plainly attired, and displaying in her features the interest with which she had heard the observations of the bystanders, withdrew a short distance from the throng, and took her station nearer the arch, where she could avoid the rude contact of the multitude, and yet obtain an early intimation of the arrival.

A shawl of simple pattern, drawn tightly around her figure, revealed a symmetry of form that at once attracted the attention; and as the lamp above reflected its light upon her face, there was perceived a pensive beauty in her countenance, which the shade of sadness with which it was mingled contributed rather to heighten than dispel.

By her hand she gently held a little boy, apparently six years old, whose eyes, with the wondering gaze of childhood, were directed alternately from the novel variety of objects around him to the pale features of his companion, by whom the fleeting minutes were being regarded with emotions of the most intense and painful nature.

She was evidently too young to be his mother, and the dissimilarity that was apparent even on a hasty glance would have sufficed to remove any lingering supposition of that kind; but the affection with which she had thrown a portion of her own scanty apparel round the child, in order to protect him from the

night air, disclosed a regardful solicitnde so maternal in its natnre that it was evident a close relationship existed between them.

A few paces off, intently watching the two figures we have described, was a tall, shabbily-dressed man of more than middle age, whose utter inattention to the feverish impatience that prevailed betokened he had been merely attracted to the spot as a lonnger. Carelessly leaning against the railings, and divesting at intervals his cigar of its ashes, he only seemed anxious to obtain some excitement from the scene which would serve to divert a tedious hour. It was probably the unwelcome attention he had already bestowed on the yonng woman, whose features apparently now engrossed his observation, that had caused her to change her position, in order to relieve herself from his intense scrutiny.

Snddenly a bustling excitement that was visible among the officials at the station showed that the train was approaching. Swiftly on through the gloom sped the shrieking engine, sending forth from its red lamps a fiery herald of its progress, and then slackening its pace as the long line of light at the terminus grew more and more distinct, the carriages finally stopped heneath the portico, and the passengers alighted, equally gratified with those remaining without at their destination having been reached in safety.

And then commenced that scene of busy animation which ever attends the coming in of the night train. Porters actively engaged in cramming boxes on to trucks, cahmen industriously packing portly passengers into small vehicles, railway officials fixing sleek post-horses to private carriages, omnibus-drivers outside rattling off with heavy loads, and the motley throng of dusty third-class passengers struggling under the weight of carpet-hags and unwieldy parcels, all contributed to give that lively aspect to the place which is invariably such a source of amazement to the stranger who has thus for the first time been brought within the vortex of metropolitan life.

Among those who now arrived there was at least one whose visit was of this kind. The timid and uncertain air with which he encountered the numerous questions of the porters who thronged about him, his confused gaze at the immense mass of people in constant motion, his unpractised eye as it glanced anxiously through the crowd to catch some familiar feature, all betrayed the arrival of one to whom every thing around was strange and bewildering. His figure was slender but well-formed, and his face, neither deficient in comeliness nor expression, bore upon it the freshness of youth and the healthy hue of the country. From his hand was slung a small box, tightly corded, and beneath the fastening was a card boldly inscribed in a round legible hand with the name of "Henry Thornton."

Scarcely had he passed through the lofty portal which was now opened to permit the egress of passengers, than a soft silvery voice came like mnsic on his ear, and a rapid exclamation of "*Henry, my dear brother!*" brought about a recognition that had been long anxiously looked forward to on both sides. An earnest greeting ensued, words mntnally expressive of the most tender affection were exchanged, and when the fervent pressure of the hand had been returned with increased ardour, and the nnmerous qnestions that always accompany a meeting between two persons after a long absence had been hnrriedly asked and answered, Emma Thornton, the yonng girl whom we first introduced to the reader's acquaintance, accompanied by her two brothers—one the little light-haired urchin, whom she had brought partly for protection, and partly to welcome his elder brother, and the other, Henry Thornton, who had thus rejoined her from the conntry—returned with a light heart and a cheerfnl spirit to what was in future to be a joint home for these three re-united members of a once happy and prosperous family.

Leaving them for a time to pursne their way towards a street at the back of the Hampstead Road, where Emma's hnmble apartments for herself and brother were sitnated, we return to the terminus, and notice that from one of the second-class carriages there proceeded at the same moment a tall, middle-aged individnal, with a profusion of dark hair and a pair of keen searching eyes, who exhibited that nonchalance and undisturbed self-possession which at once stamped him as a man of the world, to whom all the intricacies and inconveniences of travelling had long become perfectly familiar. Grasping the carpet-hag which he had withdrawn from beneath the cnshion, and desiring the porter, in an off-hand tone, to hand over from the luggage van a portmanteau belonging to "Mr. Fitzroy Greene," he speedily engaged a cab for himself and appurtenances, and was soon after on his way to the Tavistock Hotel, Covent Garden, whither the driver had received instructions to proceed.

From a first-class carriage, receiving every courtesy as he alighted, and having attendants crowding round him to execnte the slightest wish to which he might give utterance, there also descended during the same time a third passenger, with whom our futnre chapters will be intimately connected. He was a man of about fifty years of age, with strongly marked features indicative of inflexible firmness and decision. Attired in habiliments of the best material and most exquisite workmanship, his linen of the finest textnre, and his demeanour imperious and dignified, as one accustomed to command and receive the attentions that were proffered, he could have been recognised without difficulty as a nobleman of distinction. His valet, who accompanied the private carriage already waiting at the terminus for his reception, saw the travelling trunks removed from the train with the most officious care, and as, from the coronet emblazoned on the panels of the carriage, a few loiterers had clustered round, they were promptly dispersed by the intervention of the police. Obseqniously assisting his lordship to the interior, richly fitted up with all the elegant luxuriance that money could attain and art devise, the valet closed the door of the carriage, and the coachman having resumed the reins, the Earl of Winterton was conveyed to his town mansion in Piccadilly.

We have thus seen three travellers—each strangers to one other, and yet whose destinies will be found enriously commingled—alight on the same night from the same conveyance.

But on a railway, as in society itself, there are three classes, all impelled by the same motive power, and yet each sharing an nnequal division of the comforts to be enjoyed in the journey through life. Thus is the railroad a type of existence.

From each of these three distinctive classes we might trace the fortunes of an individnal, and show the social web to be so curiously entangled, that however widely separated by their various stations each of these strangers are from each other, the time may come when their pursnits will be bound up in one common interest, and their friendship necessary for mntual advantage and protection.

We have thus before us the representatives of the three classes:—

The Earl of Winterton, of the *first class.*

Mr. Fitzroy Greene, of the *second class.*

Henry Thornton, of the *third class.*

The same distinctions are of daily experience, yet so finely is the social line of demarcation drawn, that who shall say where the interests of the lowest terminate, or where the interests of the highest begin?

CHAPTER II.

THE THREE PASSENGERS.

Before describing the humble apartment in which the Thorntons were now seated, it will be necessary to furnish a few preliminary particulars that may serve to briefly acquaint the reader with the cause of their present position.

Mr. Thornton, senior, had been a Liverpool merchant, whose estate, having been devoted chiefly to sustain a branch bank with which he had been connected, was utterly lost during the memorable panic of 1825. The irrevocable ruin with which he found himself surrounded gradually preyed upon his spirits, and he died a broken-hearted man, after a fruitless struggle to recover his former fortune. His young widow, thus suddenly reduced from affluence to poverty, with two children looking up to her for support, was compelled to break up her establishment, and retire to a small village near Chester, the better to eke out the slender annuity which some friends had purchased for her out of the wreck of her former wealth. Here she had resided for some time, contented with the peaceful seclusion of the place, when, either oppressed with the sense of her own loneliness, or anxious to provide a protector for her children, she yielded to the persuasion of her acquaintances, and ventured upon matrimony a second time, forming an alliance with a person named Mordaunt, who, though a comparative stranger in the village, had, by his plausible manner and specious representations, succeeded in acquiring her affection. One short twelvemonth sufficed, however, to dispel all her dreams of happiness. Mordaunt was identified as a well-known adventurer, who had been concerned just before in some extensive schemes of forgery; and owing mainly to the ingenuity of his wronged wife, who misled the officer that came with a warrant for his apprehension, he eluded pursuit, and escaped to America. From this time all trace of him was lost, and from various severe storms having occurred about that time, it was presumed the ship in which he had embarked had foundered on the passage. Mrs. Thornton—for the name of Mordaunt she from that period refused to bear—died shortly afterwards in giving birth to a son; and the children, being thus left orphans, were utterly dependent on the tender mercies of a distant relation, who, having a family of his own, was naturally anxious to get rid of his extra burthens as quickly as possible. As soon, therefore, as opportunity afforded, Emma Thornton was sent off to London under the express care of Madame Duchard, a fashionable West-end milliner, with whom she was to board and lodge until her period of apprenticeship had expired. Henry was articled to a tradesman in a quiet country town; and the youngest, on whom had been bestowed the appellation of Frederick, was left with the nurse to thrive until it reached a practicable age. Neither time nor absence, however, served to abate the deeply cherished affection between the elder brother and sister; and having maintained a correspondence of nearly seven years, the long anticipated project that had been so often dwelt upon in their letters began to assume at last a palpable form, and the day was named that was to behold it put into execution. It was a joyous anticipation; for on that day would both brother and sister be released from the bondage of their youth, — on that day they would acquire a mastery over their own actions, would be responsible only to themselves, and have nothing to control, and nobody to chide them but their own hearts and each other. They would have the world before them, wherein they hoped to procure, by mutual aid, a creditable competency, and they would at the same time have the consolation of sympathy and society in the hour of illness or misfortune.

Nothing could have been better arranged or more complete than the preparations Emma had made for their future domestic establishment. Securing, at a moderate rent, two rooms ready furnished in a retired but reputable street, at a convenient distance from the west-end and the city to suit their prospective individual avocations, she had likewise taken advantage of the nurse's expedition to town to have her adopted charge brought up and confided to her care, impressed with the consciousness, at least, that no longer could it be considered as an incumbrance. On the evening succeeding, Henry had announced his belief that he should reach London; and in pursuance of this intimation Emma had eagerly awaited his arrival in the manner detailed at the opening of our narrative. No inconsiderable portion of Emma's slender finances had been expended on the purchase of a few extra delicacies, to form a tempting repast for the occasion; and when her long-expected guest arrived at last, it was a sufficient reward for her to know, from his unbounded admiration of every thing he saw, that the result of her exertions had been duly appreciated.

It would not be easy to imagine a more perfect picture of happiness than was presented by these two happy relatives, whilst thus chatting away the time; for little Freddy, overcome by the excitement and the lateness of the hour, had fallen fast asleep in the chair, in a vain attempt to grasp the dimensions of an unusually thick slice of cake, and was therefore unable to take even a minor part in the conversation. They were happy in their own purity of heart, happy in their guileless innocence, and happy, too, in their ignorance of the very world they were about to enter; for that knowledge, like the dearly bought wisdom of our first parents, is, alas! too frequently purchased by sin and shame.

"Come, you have not half done your journey justice," exclaimed Emma, as she endeavoured to persuade him with the "smallest possible" portion more of a cold veal pie, of her own manufacture; "you must have felt the effects of our smoky atmosphere already."

"Nay, I think I have given tolerable proof of still having my north-country appetite in wondrous preservation, sister mine," returned the youth laughingly; "but, to confess the truth, my mind is so fully occupied with the idea of that vast city which to-morrow I shall have, for the first time, an opportunity of exploring, that I can hardly hope to dream of any thing else. In a great metropolis like this, for one active and willing like myself, employment of some kind or other must be easily obtained; and, thanks to the education which I have had, there is nothing which I do not feel myself competent to undertake."

"And my own plans for the future are equally

promising with your own, dear Henry," continued Emma; "my exertions will, at least, secure some addition to our income, and provide for the instruction of our little Frederick; but, upon my word, Henry, you have positively grown so handsome and accomplished since we last met, that I expect one of our fine London ladies will soon lose her heart, and be anxious to have you for a husband. You must guard yourself from their fascination as you best can."

"Trust me, I have little fear of that," rejoined her brother, smiling; "for, to make you the confidant of a profound secret, I have lost my heart already, and am therefore proof against the most dangerous wiles of any city damsel: but it is growing late, and my long journey has made rest somewhat needful; so I propose we should reserve any further debate upon our projects for our breakfast-table of to-morrow."

"Agreed; one has long since set us the example of retiring, by going into a sound doze,—and it is already past midnight; so, leaving you to transform, by a little of our metropolitan magic, that sofa into a bedstead, I shall take my young charge with me, and wish you good night."

Henry Thornton imprinted a fraternal kiss upon the smooth, marble forehead of his sister, and, bidding her good night in return, watched her retire with her slumbering *protegé* into an adjoining apartment, and then closing the door, began to make those preparations for his night's repose which the necessity of a bedroom being made a parlour by day rendered a necessary preliminary. It was long, however, before he could compose himself to sleep. The effects of over fatigue is often such as to produce a provoking wakefulness; and so Henry found it on the present occasion. Varied thoughts were passing through his brain; his mind was busy in framing a hundred projects for the future; and the feverish excitement which this created was increased by the novelty of his situation and the extreme sultriness of the weather. The constant rattle, too, of the vehicles passing to and fro along the distant thoroughfares formed a striking contrast with the stillness of the night in his own former retired dwelling; and this murmurous sound, so familiar to the ears of a Londoner, contributed also to banish from his eyes the gentle weight of sleep. Finding every attempt to relapse into forgetfulness completely ineffectual, he rose from his couch, and, again resuming his habiliments, threw open the window, and determined to watch for the first appearance of daybreak, which he knew would not be long ere it made its approach.

There were, however, no stars to spangle the firmament with their twinkling lustre. A dense cloudiness covered the sky, and a heavy oppressive sense of heat was felt, that depressed the spirits as with a foreboding of coming evil. Not a breath of air revived the senses of the watcher, nor cooled the moisture on his brow. The atmosphere seemed hot and stifling, and the murky gloom that enshrouded the sleeping city like a funereal pall appeared almost palpable to the touch. Suddenly the silence was broken by the distant tones of the clock at St. Paul's Cathedral striking the hour of two.

As Thornton heard for the first time the successive strokes booming upon his ear, a consciousness stole upon him of the thousands who were, like him, within the sound of that great monitor, and the knell which it had rung to many of their brightest dreams and most ardent anticipations. Would that vast machine of metal, sentinelled in that dark belfry, abandoned to its own stealthy movements, and yet tracking with inexorable finger the lapse of every second, and roaring forth with a sonorous tongue the progress of indomitable time—would this solemn chronicler of the hopes that hourly perish, in like manner respond to the destruction of his own? There was a thrill of sadness that passed through his mind as he thus contemplated the untrodden path of his future existence, which might have been almost taken as a presentiment.

The density of the clouds now appeared to increase, and from the dark lurid masses of vapour startling flashes of what is called "sheet-lightning" shot forth, breaking up the gloomy expanse with sudden streaks of intermittent light, and faintly illuminating the apartment in which he stood. For some time Thornton had continued to observe the electric display with the interest of one who loves to mark the varied scenes of nature under every aspect; and he had become absorbed in meditation when he heard—so close behind him that the sound fell distinctly upon his ear—the tread of receding footsteps.

His first impulse was to turn round and address the untimely visitor, in the belief that it was his sister; but though he spoke twice—first subduing his voice, and then repeating his inquiry in a louder tone—no answer was returned, and the impenetrable darkness that prevailed rendered nugatory any attempt to distinguish another figure in the room besides his own. He listened again; his sense of hearing strained to the utmost, that the slightest sound might be detected, but he heard no more; and, concluding that it was either a mere creation of fancy or the movement of one of the other lodgers in a room above, he sought no further.

But a most extraordinary circumstance now occurred.

By the side of the window at which he stood was a long plate of looking-glass, fixed in an antique gilt frame against the wall; and as he was carelessly regarding the dim outline of this piece of furniture, a flash brighter than the preceding ones lit up with a momentary gleam the whole of the apartment behind him, and he caught for an instant in the mirror—peering over his own shoulder—the reflection of a man's face. Though the features were but there portrayed for an instant, the impression that they left was most vivid and enduring; and what added to his perplexity was a conviction that he had a faint remembrance of having seen those features before. The deep, sunken eyes—the firm, compressed mouth—the unshorn chin, and the mass of wiry, jet-black hair that clustered round the brow—were all familiar to his gaze; but to whom they had belonged, or where he had seen them last, was a mystery that he failed to unravel. The expression of the countenance, transitory as was its revelation, spoke of a long career of wretchedness and crime, and yet intimately blended with it was something that evoked both interest and pity. It was as if the spectre of one long entombed had risen in the depth of night to startle a former acquaintance with its momentary presence.

Appalled as he was by this unexpected sight, and almost paralysed by its suddenness, thoughts like these passed rapidly through his mind ere he had sufficiently recovered from his astonishment to seek the cause of an apparition so extraordinary. When, however, he had done so, and, having kindled a light, had scrutinised closely every part of the room, all trace of an intruder was gone; and had any person really entered the apartment, the disappearance must have been

managed as silently and adroitly as the entrance had been made.

Thus bewildered by a number of suspicions connected with the phantom-features he had beheld, and agitated by a variety of conflicting emotions besides, Thornton again sought his couch, and the first faint light of morning saw him dropping off into a protracted but feverish and unrefreshing slumber.

* * * * *

On the north side of the Piazza that encloses Covent Garden Market is situated the Tavistock Hotel, a tavern held in high estimation by country gentlemen who pay fleeting visits to the metropolis, and are not addicted to restricting their expenses during the period of their stay. The house exteriorly presents no particular features of architectural embellishment; but within, the apartments are fitted up with that attention to the luxuriant comfort of the guests which is so peculiar a characteristic of the higher class of metropolitan hotels.

Over the Piazza, and extending the whole length of the building, is the coffee-room, a lofty and spacious apartment looking out upon the diversified scene presented by the market beneath. Although generally forming the breakfast and dining-room of those who, merely engaging beds for a few nights, do not require the extra accommodation of a private apartment, it is in the evening rarely frequented, until the return of the guests from the places of amusement they have patronised again invests it with nocturnal animation.

Thus on the same evening on which the events above recorded took place, the only inmate of that extensive room enjoyed a privacy as complete as though he had given instructions for it to have been retained exclusively for himself. The waiter, having executed his orders, had retired to join his associates below, the principal members of the establishment were in the bar busily occupied in arranging accounts and making out bills for such of their lodgers as had intimated their intention of leaving by the early trains in the morning, and throughout the entire building there was a stillness that promised a perfect freedom from interruption.

The solitary guest thus left entirely to his own reflections had chosen a seat near the window, the blind of which he had partially drawn aside to avail himself of the slight view it afforded him of the approaches to the hotel. Before him had been placed a pint of sherry, and the evening newspaper; but the one he had scarcely tasted, and over the columns of the other he had but carelessly glanced. In appearance he was a short, dumpy individual, plainly attired in a black suit, with a sharp, shrewd visage, the natural repulsiveness of which was in some degree concealed by a pair of green spectacles, and through these gleamed two penetrating eyes, that seemed capable of reading the inmost thoughts of the person to whom they were directed. The frequent withdrawal of his watch, and the habitual relief he sought from the silver snuff-box he had ostentatiously placed upon the table, both testified to the impatience with which he awaited the arrival of the person whom he had apparently for some time expected.

"Another quarter of an hour gone!" growled forth the impatient gentleman, again having recourse to his horological monitor and a reviving pinch of rappee; "can I have mistaken the time of the appointment, or does he mean to play me false in this affair? But no! that he cannot—*dare* not do. I have him in my power, and besides——"

The wheels of a cabriolet rattling rapidly up under the window, and the sudden stoppage of the vehicle, here snapped short the train of his meditations, whilst a sudden gleam of triumph illumined his features as he saw that the person who alighted was the one who had been the object of his thoughts. He refilled his glass, took another pinch of snuff, and, keeping his eye eagerly fixed on the door, prepared himself for the reception of the new comer. He had not long to wait. The quick tread of footsteps was heard ascending the stairs, and in another moment Mr. Fitzroy Greene had entered the room.

"Ha! my dear Parkins, here you are, I see—punctual as clockwork," began that individual, advancing towards the little man in black, and shaking him warmly by the hand. "Should have been here long ago, but our train was kept waiting at Rugby for nearly two hours by some confounded accident on the line. No lives lost, but plaguy provoking nevertheless. Afraid I have kept you waiting—eh?"

"No, not long—that is, not so *very* long," returned Mr. Parkins, hazarding a faint smile; "it makes but little difference to me."

"To be sure—quite right—all goes down in the bill of course," added his interrogator; "but are we not here too much exposed to intrusion, Parkins? A private room, now," and laying his hand on the bell, he left its tinkling summons to complete the sentence.

"Quite as well here, my dear sir—we shall be left to ourselves for another half hour at least," observed the wearer of the spectacles, "and possibly in that time we may contrive to arrange our little matter of business."

"Please yourself, Parkins," returned the other, and as the waiter at that moment arrived in answer to the summons, he changed the intended order to another pint of sherry and some cigars.

The wine was brought, and placing a tray of havannahs and a lighted wax candle on the table, the waiter bowed and left the room. They were again alone.

"And now," cried Mr. Fitzroy Greene, emptying his glass of its contents, and throwing one leg carelessly over the other, as he proceeded to ignite a cigar, "now that we are once more to ourselves, suppose we enter upon business at once. In the first place, is all clearly understood between us?"

"Beyond a doubt, my good sir," answered his companion; "perfectly understood. You are the sole heir to the valuable Greene estate, which has been so many years in Chancery, and the rightful claimant to which we have had so much difficulty to find. The landed property, consisting of several houses, messuages, and tenements situated in the neighbourhood of Salford, Manchester, Camden Town, London, and elsewhere, is now on the point of being delivered up to your acknowledged ownership and possession; and your humble agent in this intricate affair has been the unworthy individual who is now on the point of being rewarded for his trouble."

"Psha! I know all about that. I mean, is it quite understood as to the sums we should mutually receive out of this business?"

"First tell me what kind of a reception you met with from the tenants at Manchester."

"Nothing could have been warmer or more encouraging. I showed them the papers and documents you forg—"

"Found," suggested Mr. Parkins, casting a timorous glance around.

"Well, found; and their anthenticity was acknowledged without the slightest hesitation. Those who had not paid any rent for years of course grumbled at first about the probability of their being turned out by a new landlord; but when I hinted that the rent would be for some time merely nominal, they admitted my claims and surrendered up the keys."

"Excellent!" ejaculated his hearer. "And Mr. Hillier, the house-agent and builder?"

"Said he was quite convinced the right heir would turn out to be a real gentleman at last, and none of your obscure labonrers, who, when they had a fortune found for them, wouldn't know what to do with it. I gave him the order yon suggested for immediately demolishing the old houses and erecting a handsome terrace instead."

"Capital! The space is sure to be required by the railway people, and the ground will then be valuable. It will rise two hundred per cent. at least."

"Jefferson, the solicitor, who occnpied one of the houses, and had received a tolerable portion of the rents in trust, had some hesitation at first; but when I showed him the attested copy of the will, and the signature of——"

"Jonathan Greene, who died in 1749; and the genealogy, so clearly made out, throngh the correlative branches of the same family, until we come to Sarah Greene, deceased, intestate, in 1827," hurriedly interrupted the other, recapitulating with delight the evidences of his own ingenuity.

"Yes, when I showed him all that, and convinced him I was the only legitimate heir now living, he promised to look narrowly into the affair; and if he found my claim was correct, he added that he would render me every assistance to regain my rights."

"Ay, let him look—scrutinise the affair as he may—pore over the musty rolls of parchment from noon till night, and spend a lifetime in the search—he will find the old man has been too cunning to let a flaw creep into the business he has held so long in hand;" and as this was said with unusual rapidity and vehemence, the little man in black rubbed his hands with a manifestation of fiendish glee, and took a triumphant pinch of snuff from the box before him to give effect to the words he had uttered.

"And now for the terms," continued Mr. Fitzroy Greene, somewhat astonished at the exuberant action of his companion.

"You remember, my dear sir—sixty thousand pounds."

"I thonght forty was our original agreement."

"Sixty, my dear Mr. Greene—not one farthing less, I assure you. Consider the property will be estimated altogether at eighty thonsand pounds, at the least; I have already lent you two hundred pounds to prosecute your claims, and make the necessary appearance and display; and even when that is returned, you will have nearly twenty thousand at your own disposal."

"You drive a hard bargain, Mr. Parkins."

"Consider the risk I have run in this matter, and the trouble I have had, besides the expenses I have incurred, and the family I have to bring up in a respectable sphere of society; consider all this, my dear sir," pursued Mr. Parkins, "and then I am sure you will not charge me with being exorbitant in my demands."

"I mnst have a little time to dwell upon this proposal," hesitated Greene.

"There is no time like the present, my dear sir," resumed his associate.

"But let us go halves, at least."

"You forget my risk, Mr. Greene; you do, indeed. Come, another glass of sherry, there. And now here is the little document in which I have had the agreement drawn up. Write your name in that corner—a simple signature—a few strokes of the pen—and the thing is done." And as these words were uttered, the speaker drew a paper, already prepared, from his pocket-book, and adroitly placed it under the hand of his companion opposite, with the pen and ink before him.

"A simple signature—a few strokes of the pen!" Truly the action is indeed one easily performed. Yet from this source what worlds of misery have sprung! A few brief marks upon paper, a mere name scrawled upon a blank spot, and the fiend that Frankenstein created was not a more relentless persecntor. "A few strokes of the pen, and the thing is done." It is so; and at the same instant homes are made desolate, friends sundered, families beggared, and life itself destroyed. The hydra-headed monster that preys upon society is begotten from the outpourings of an ink-drop.

As Mr. Fitzroy Greene took the paper and carefully perused its contents, he looked from time to timo towards the inflexible bargain-maker, but could see no symptom of his relaxing from the condition for which he had stipulated. He gazed steadily for an instant at the green spectacles; but they betrayed no unusual glare behind, and he failed to decipher any change of expression in the month beneath. Slowly taking np the pen that had been provided, he dipped it cautiously into the inkstand—hesitated—dipped it into the ink again—and then rapidly wrote, in a dashing, bold style, his autograph, "Fitzroy Greene."

At the moment the name was traced, the lower part of Mr. Parkin's face was lit up by a grim smile, and he drank the wine he had before poured ont, to conceal the full extent of his gratification.

"There! now I hope you are satisfied, Parkins," said the new found heir, pushing the paper across the table; "and I think, for to-night, you have brought this business to a tolerably profitable conclusion."

"Perfectly!" returned the other, folding up the document, and placing it leisurely in his pocket-book. "You shall hear further from me to-morrow."

Mr. Parkins having observed their privacy was liable to be disturbed by the intrusion of strangers, now rose to depart, and in vain endeavoured to dissuade Mr. Fitzroy Greene from the ceremony of accompanying him a short distance down the staircase. Before they separated Mr. Parkins emphatically laid his hand npon the arm of the other, and in a voice too subdued to reach the ear of the attendant, who was waiting below to unbar the door, exclaimed:

"Remember, you will hear from me *to-morrow*."

"I shall be sure to be in the way," was the reply, accompanied by a reciprocal grasp as they mutually wished each other good-night.

"What an nnprincipled sconndrel it is!" thought Greene, as he ascended the staircase to his chamber.

"I never met with a more unconscionable rogue!" muttered the little man in black, as he crossed through the market on his way home by the Strand.

* * * * * *

The Earl of Winterton's town house in Piccadilly was one of those stately structures which overlook the verdant undulations and leafy expanse of the Green Park.

Never was the establishment of one of the aristo-

cracy fitted up in a more costly and luxurious style. The suite of apartments was alike remarkable for the great outlay and taste that had been bestowed in their embellishment, and these were now brilliantly illumined, and servants in gorgeous liveries were in attendance at the doors, awaiting the arrival of their master, and ready to execute the commands to which his anticipated return might give rise. Immediately the carriage was driven up before the portal, the earl was conducted through the hall to an ante-room adjoining, where divesting himself of his travelling apparel, he dismissed the servants for the night, and accompanied only by his faithful valet Bridgman, ascended by the massive stone staircase to the drawing-room above.

On this magnificent apartment the skill of the architect and the decorator had been made conspicuously manifest. The ceiling was adorned with exquisitely sculptured festoons of fruit and flowers, and from it were suspended two glittering chandeliers, the lustres of which sparkled with prismatic radiance in the light that shone above them. From the walls hung a small but choice collection of the works of the most eminent ancient and modern masters; and the sumptuous furniture, richly gilt, was disposed with that elegant negligence which is so adapted to delight the eye of a beholder. At one end of the room was a beautiful Gothic window, decorated with curtains of crimson tapestry, and opening upon an extensive prospect of the parks and distant range of country far beyond; at the opposite extremity of the room was a recess, screened with long flowing curtains of a similarly rich workmanship and colour, and in various niches were statues and busts, the proof and pride of native art and foreign *cognoscenti*.

Seating himself before a mosaic table in the centre of the room, curiously inlaid with gold, the earl wrote a few hurried lines, and sealing the letter with the assistance of a taper, that shed a fragrant perfume on being kindled, he impressed the molten wax with his crest, and gave the billet to his valet, with directions to bear it immediately to the party for whom it was addressed.

The valet bowed, and was about leaving the apartment to obey the instructions he had received, when the earl, as if reminded suddenly of a circumstance he had forgotten, called him back.

"Are you aware, Bridgman, whether the Lady Adeline Temple is at the opera to-night?" inquired the earl.

"I have heard, my lord, it was her ladyship's intention to have gone, for her carriage was ordered, but owing to her ladyship suffering afterwards from a slight indisposition, the coachman's instructions were countermanded, and her ladyship remained at home."

"Give, then, that letter to her yourself, if she has not yet retired to rest, and add that I shall expect to have the pleasure of calling upon her to-morrow if convenient."

"It shall be done, your lordship; but if her ladyship is not visible?"

"Bring back the note, and see that you deliver it to her as early as possible in the morning."

Bridgman then quitted the apartment.

The earl, now released from observation, gave full sway to the tenor of his reflections, which were of a nature peculiarly painful and embarrassing.

For amidst this scene of wealth and luxury he dwelt alone, without participating in those gentle affections, devoid of which the world itself is but a blank and life a burden—without a child to bear his name—without one of whose love he felt secure, and to whose regard no suspicion of interested motives could attach.

In this magnificent and spacious mansion he had none to share with him its dominion; and in the midst of a great city, surrounded by all the attributes of rank and fashion, with servants eager to attend his bidding, and every wish that money could procure fulfilled, he yet felt himself a solitary, and his heart an aching void.

Deeply, then, did he regret having attained so advanced an age without having effected a matrimonial union with one equal to himself in birth and station, and competent to fulfil those maternal duties which he so anxiously desired to see performed. For he knew, should he die without an heir, the title would become extinct, and that the noble mansion and estate, on which he had lavished the care and labour of a life-time, would descend to one whom he abhorred for his vices, and against whom he had vowed an enduring and unrelenting hatred.

It was, therefore, with some anxiety that he was now awaiting the result of the negotiations pending between himself and the Lady Adeline Temple.

Yet must it not be concluded, from the life of celibacy the earl had hitherto led, that he had been a stranger to the passion of love, or unsusceptible of its vivifying influence. No; when, in early life, he had spent a few years on the continent, he had rendered up his whole soul to its delicious thrall, and abandoned himself to the fascinating charms of an Italian lady with whom he had become acquainted at Naples. And how fondly he had treasured up her memory, and how dearly he had prized her affection, the jealous care with which he had preserved her portrait, through a long, long lapse of years, had fully testified. Often, in his hours of meditative solitude, had he withdrawn this cherished miniature from its secret hiding-place, and gazed upon it with the same ardour as in former days he had dwelt enraptured on the voluptuous beauty of the original.

With this before him, he would recall the vermeil hue of the moist, rosy lips he had pressed so frequently and fervently to his own; he would again feel resting, on his burning cheek the dark, luxuriant tresses that clustered in flowing curls around her snowy neck whilst the full, large, lustrous eyes that beamed his love-gaze back, would again shine before him in their former splendour, to remind him of the treasure he had lost. Lost! for a sudden summons to return to England and receive the last blessing of his father, had torn him from her embraces; and when he again returned to Italy to place her in the position which her transcendant charms and varied accomplishments demanded, he found his designs baffled and his hopes frustrated, for he could discover no traces of the fair Gianella. From that period he had in vain sought to procure some intelligence of her fate; but more than twenty years had since elapsed, and he had learned nothing.

Yet still the effects of that first ardent attachment had not passed away; the fire smouldered, but was not extinguished, and the old man was true to the passion of his youth.

We may thus understand why it was, on the departure of his valet, that the Earl of Winterton withdrew from a secret panel in his escritoire a small but exquisitely-painted miniature; and as he gazed upon those familiar lineaments, and recalled the associations to which they gave rise, his thoughts wandered from the present, and sought a refuge from the uncer-

tain and stormy skies of the future in the mirror of the remote past.

Leaving the nobleman plunged in a profound revery of this kind, we must now beg the reader to accompany us on a visit to a totally opposite quarter of the metropolis, and there make acquaintance with a character who will have to play a somewhat conspicuous part in our faithful record of the lights and shadows of a London existence.

CHAPTER III.

THE BIRD-FANCIER.

In the eastern extremity of London—utterly unknown to thousands who have been born and passed their lives at the west end—there is a district which for filth, wretchedness, and squalid misery, can hardly be surpassed by any other in the metropolis.

The London and Blackwall Railway crosses a portion of this repulsive region; but the slight view afforded to the passenger, as he gazes from the window of the carriage during the rapid progress of the train, is inadequate to give more than a very faint notion of the vice and poverty to be found within its limits.

From the Cannon-street road to the West India Docks the line of the railway is carried upon arches over a series of streets so densely populated that scarcely a house can be met with untenanted by less than six, and in some cases eight, distinct families. Trending towards the banks of the river, and lying south of the busy thoroughfare of Radcliffe Highway, are miserable tenements, built upwards of a century ago, and still exhibiting the narrow-pointed gables and projecting windows of a former age. These are now crumbling down about the heads of the inmates; and though here and there a supporting rafter shows that the landlord, in attempting to arrest the dilapidation, has sought to postpone the hour of the final fall, the broken windows left unmended, and the rotten bricks pulverised to dust by the slightest touch, show the work of destruction silently but surely going on has been tacitly acknowledged both by tenant and owner to be beyond the reach of effectual repair.

The chief inhabitants of this locality are those employed in various ways about the neighbourhood of the

docks and the river. Coalwhippers, labourers, and artisans of various grades, have here taken up their abode, but the air of penury and pauperism presented by the confined courts and narrow alleys that branch from the main thoroughfares will show how scanty must be the remuneration that affords no better description of dwelling. The miscellaneous character of the population is increased by the mingling of these hard-working people with others who derive their subsistence from a less honourable and more fluctuating source. In the cheap lodging-houses that abound about this quarter will be met with most of the vagrants and tramps that infest the eastern suburbs after nightfall; and here also dwell the very lowest class of women, who, belonging to a race hardly recognised in polite phraseology by name, prey upon the purse of the unwary sailor, and who frequently, on the first night of his long looked-for return to England, contrive, by hocussing or barefaced robbery, to possess themselves of the earnings he has been so long and so laboriously striving to acquire. Groups of pallid children, scantily clad, and with their features scarred by some unsightly eruption, are to be seen playing all day long in the centre of the road, and wallowing in the mire of the kennel; but the merry ring of laughter heard from childhood under better auspices is never audible among them, and their hilarity has a cold and cheerless depression with it which makes it dismal to contemplate. They seem to have already a consciousness of coming care, and the privations they daily undergo exhibit a marked effect upon their spirits, pressing heavily upon the enjoyment even of the trifling pastimes of the young, and making them grow up premature old men and women, haggard and grey before their time.

Over the door of a small shop in a little dreary street in this neighbourhood might have been noticed the name of "Jacob Randall," who, from the cages hung all about the windows and the door-way, appeared to follow the ostensible pursuit of a bird-fancier, and who now, lounging on the threshold mending a trap-cage, that had suffered the demolition of a few wires, afforded a passer-by a very favourable opportunity for studying his singularly broad and massive proportions.

Beyond the ordinary size, his figure was characterised by a muscular development that, besides attracting the eye by its rude symmetry, gave the observer some idea of the enormous strength of its possessor. His features, round and prominent in form, were imbued with a sinister cast of expression that seemed the more remarkable from its variance with the gentle avocation he pursued; and his attire, consisting of a rough fustian jacket, stout corduroy trousers, fur cap, and boots thickly encrusted with clay from his last nocturnal expedition into the country, imparted to his appearance rather the outward guise of a settler in the back woods of America than a denizen of the metropolis.

The interior of the shop was filled with cages of every description, each retaining in imprisonment some favourite songster of the field and grove. The lark, linnet, goldfinch, chaffinch, bullfinch, and the rest of our woodland melodists, had each their representative in the confined space allotted to them; and amidst the pyramid of cages where the sleek blackbird, the dappled thrush, and the golden canary, were pouring forth the strains of their native minstrelsy, a macaw, screaming with delight in the pride of its finer plumage, parrots, and a motley collection of other saleable foreign birds, were plentifully distributed. Behind the shop was a small back parlour, poorly but neatly furnished, with a few ornaments scattered round the room, that manifestly revealed the care and intelligence of a presiding female hand. Such, indeed, there was; for the only occupant of that house, besides the bird-fancier himself, was his daughter, a girl of eighteen, who, in person and manner, presented a marked distinction from her parent. Mary Randall was just at that eventful period of life when the charms of womanhood are on the eve of swelling forth into their full proportions. Her face, pretty and interesting, was shaded with masses of light brown hair, that swept in tresses of graceful negligence over her neck and shoulders; and her form, exquisitely symmetrical, was so well displayed by the plain and unpretending dress she wore, that but little envy might have been created in her bosom at the sight of courtly damsels decked in all the pomp and pageantry of the newest fashions. Gentle and patient in her disposition, and with a heart capable of experiencing the most ardent and enduring affection, the sweet tones of her voice sounded in that dull and gloomy apartment like the warbling of a bird who greets the first warm rain of spring whilst hidden in its leafy home, amid the balmy buds and bursting branches. To her vigilant attention and unremitting care did the feathered captives owe the comforts they enjoyed.

For some time Randall continued standing at the door, pursuing his occupation with the vacant air of one whose hands are mechanically employed whilst his thoughts are far away from the scene of their employment, when, turning to his daughter, who was in the back room, quietly engaged in needlework, and possibly her own meditations, he bade her hastily prepare some food for his repast, and get his other coat in readiness.

"Away so soon, father!" cried the young girl, with some surprise at a determination so sudden, for she well knew what this request foreboded; "shall I never have you again at home for two days together? I feel so wretched and so lonely in this dismal place when you are gone!"

"Psha! girl," returned Randall abruptly; "I have pressing business on my hands now that will not suffer me to keep within. There is money to be earned, girl; gold—bright gold—my child, think of that."

"Little else, dear father, have you thought of lately," continued his daughter, actively making the few preparations that were requisite; "your hopes seem now bent upon acquiring money by other means than the business, which I am sure yields enough for both our humble wants."

"Tush! Mary; you shall know all in good time. I shall but stop to take a snack before I go, and then I must away to the waterside, where I have promised to meet some of the crew belonging to the Agamemnon, that has just arrived in port; and perhaps, besides a rare bird or two, I may find something of value from a foreign country for yourself."

Mary Randall fixed her eyes intently upon the countenance of her father, read dissimulation in the glance, looked down, and remained silent. Jacob, too intent upon the substantial fare his daughter had provided to heed the scrutiny with which she had watched his features, was apparently content with the effect of his communication, and said no more until he had concluded his repast. He then raised his eyes, and saw his daughter in tears.

"Come, come, Poll, none of this," exclaimed Randall, resuming his former bluntness of manner; "you

know I hate this sentimental whimpering, and if you want to drive me away sooner from you, that's the best way to do it."

"I was but thinking, father," sobbed the girl, "how your temper and manner had altered since dear mother died. It is not more than a twelvemonth ago, and since that time you have been not only harsh and unkind to me, but have stopped away from home for nights and nights together. Oh, in those long dreary nights, when here in this dreadful place I am alone and unprotected, and the slightest sound fills me with alarm, I cannot tell you what I suffer."

"You are a foolish, timid girl, Mary," rejoined Randall, somewhat softening his tone towards her. "What is there to fear here, that bolts and bars will not prevent? and I should like to know who would dare to harm you whilst I had power to resent it."

"But it is not only for myself, father, that I fear," pursued Mary, raising her moist eyes to those of her parent, and speaking in a voice tremulous with emotion; "my apprehensions are likewise excited for your own safety. I know you are not thus absent for hours on account of the nature of your calling. I have marked the change that gradually came over you, and fear that you are leagued with bold, bad men, who, having once drawn you amongst them, will not rest until they have brought destruction on us both."

"You had better talk about what you understand, Poll," answered Randall, doggedly, "and leave me to manage my own concerns. It is enough for you to know that I am engaged in that which will put more money in our purses than the humdrum trade we have hitherto been compelled to follow; and as for any injury, Poll, that it may do us, leave your father alone for not putting his head any further into a noose than he can manage to draw it back again. But come, I have no time to lose; give me my coat, and pour me out some brandy, and then rest content till I return."

Mary placed the garment before him, and filling a tumbler half full of the ardent spirit he had required, Randall drained its contents, twisted a large red handkerchief round his throat, threw on a long rough frieze coat, and then reaching a stout serviceable stick from a corner of the apartment, bade his daughter farewell, and strode away into the open street.

Mary stood by the threshold for some time, anxiously watching the rapidly retreating form of her father, until a turning in the thoroughfare caused him to be lost to sight; and then unable to suppress any longer the violence of her emotions, she returned to the gloomy room at the back, and sank into a chair, and burying her face in her hands, gave full sway to her feelings in a burst of tears. At the same time the birds, cheering up under the influence of a few rays of sunlight that at last had found their way into that murky street, poured forth a tribute to the setting sun, in a full tide of song, and fluttered their wings against the bars, as if momentarily deluded into the belief that they were once again in the enjoyment of fresh air and liberty.

"Even those poor prisoners," thought Mary, as she found her attention roused by the blithe chirruping around her, "have their moments of happiness, whilst I am doomed to pass my life in this cheerless abode amid the most revolting scenes of vice and misery. With each day my father gets more brutal and more dissipated. Last night, in the ferocity of his drunken passion, he even gave me *blows*—it was the first time, and they struck me to the heart—and when he returns again I may have reason to dread even worse usage from his hands. I could endure all but this; harsh words, reproof, privations, all I could bear without a murmur, but a parent's cruelty—never!" and thus, with her thoughts engrossed by a melancholy revery arising from her sad position, Mary sat for hours brooding in that dreary room, with dim shadows gathering around her in the misty twilight, until the birds, chirping in restless activity, huddled up together for warmth, and slunk upon their perches to repose, there to dream, perhaps, of the green fields and rose-starred hedgerows they were never again destined to behold.

For some time Randall hurried on, threading the most intricate and unfrequented streets with the easy confidence of one who had an intimate acquaintance with the locality, and who knew that his own strength was a safeguard against the chance of any rough opposition that he might encounter in his progress, until, coming to a narrow court leading to the water-side, he slackened his pace, and entered the tap-room of a dirty-looking public-house that stood at the corner of this uninviting thoroughfare.

The interior of the room was screened from external observation by a dingy, tattered red curtain fastened across the lower part of the window, and around were ranged the common deal benches and tables, that, forming as usual the furniture of such places, were profusely covered with pewter measures, broken pipes, and other evidences of the refreshment most extensively patronised by the frequenters.

In an obscure corner of this room, dimly perceptible in the yellow rays of the gaslight—which was here kept burning all day long, the clearer light of heaven being excluded by the height of the houses opposite and the stifling confinement of the narrow court—there sat an old man, in whose lineaments might have been traced the effect of the worst and fiercest passions of humanity. His apparel was shabby even when seen by that flickering illumination; but when exposed to the full glare of daylight, it was positively repulsive. Fastened round his body by pins—for the original buttons had long since taken their departure—was an old coat, worn absolutely threadbare by long use, and the elbows and sleeves of which were patched in every direction with clumsy pieces of cloth, that had now become as grimy and greasy as the rest. Waistcoat he had none, but a shirt thoroughly blackened by habitual exposure was seen instead—not through the customary opening, for his coat was girdled tightly up to his throat, but peering out under the armpits and where the patches about the elbow had given way, and here it revealed enough to manifest the wearer's indifference to clean linen. His trousers, once of a specific and decided colour, had now assumed a variety of hues, as the mingled stains of time, ink, and beer, had at various periods imparted; whilst the edges, ragged and uneven, hung low down over a pair of venerable highlows, through the toes of which the old worsted stockings underneath boldly protruded. On his head, over a mass of coarse, matted, grey hair, he wore a shapeless covering which might have been once a hat, but the brim having been broken off piecemeal, and the crown having been so bent and battered that its original shape was beyond the possibility of conjecture, it was difficult to arrive at a precise idea of what portion of the wardrobe this had been once a constituent part.

Such was the individual to whom Randall, after an eager survey of the room on his entrance, at once proceeded; and, seating himself on a bench opposite, the old man shuffled uneasily nearer to his new companion, and nodded his head as a token of recognition.

"Well, Hawkins,' began the bird-fancier, "I am here, punctual to the time you appointed, eh? You have the ready with you, I hope?"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Randall," answered the other, speaking in a hoarse whisper, and casting an uneasy glance around him, "I have it here—here all safe—twenty pounds in bright golden sovereigns, which shall be yours—all yours—if you fulfil the terms of our compact;" and as he thus spoke, the old man drew from under his coat a small canvass bag.

"If!" sneered Randall, grasping the bag with one hand, whilst he counted out the contents with the other; "have I not given you my word it shall be done, and is not that enough?"

"Mind, there must be no unnecessary violence," gasped the old miser, seeing that his associate had already secured the money in his possession; "only hold him fast—keep him safe under lock and key—until we make him restore the money he has robbed me of; and then——"

"And then what I have got is to be doubled, eh?"

"Yes, doubled. You shall have twenty more of the same kind. Only bring this affair off well with safety and secrecy, and I will pay you the remainder immediately."

"Ha! it was a lucky thing for you, Mr. Hawkins, since that appears to be your name," pursued Randall, fixing his eyes inquiringly on the furrowed features of his companion—"it was a lucky thing for you that we encountered each other that morning on the marshes, for I don't think you would have found another that would have answered your purpose so well. Who would have thought an old, miserable-looking hunks like you would have got up at daybreak to bury money in an old hovel, and that I, who had been out all night snaring birds for the cage, should have had the first view of such an interesting occupation, and have caught a goldfinch laying eggs which many a cunning hand would like to have taken, had they had a head long enough to know where to look for them."

"Hush—hush for your life, Mr. Randall!" exclaimed the alarmed usurer, laying his long, thin, bony hand in a deprecating manner on the arm of his companion, and glancing uneasily round. "Suppose we should be overheard by somebody, or that you should let any body know where the fruits of my long life of frugality and industry lie hidden, what would become of me then, Mr. Randall?"

"Make your mind easy on that score, my venerable money-grubber," returned the other, carelessly; "I have pledged my word never to betray your secret to mortal breathing; and who, looking at a half-starved, villanously-dressed old fellow like you, would suspect that there was a sixpence in the world that you could call your own?"

"Ah, I am poor, wretchedly poor, Mr. Randall," replied Hawkins,—"barely enough to eke out a miserable existence with, I assure you; but *he* has got it all—every shilling belongs to me—it does indeed; and then, when we have got that secure, we shall be able to flaunt it with the best of them:" and as the old man spoke, his eyes were gleaming with delight at the picture his imagination had conjured up.

"By the way, you have told me but half of the story as yet," observed the bird-fancier; "this man is to be pinioned and borne away without violence——"

"Ah, you are strong—very strong, Mr. Randall," chuckled the miser, looking with delight on the gaunt frame and powerful limbs of his companion. "You are sure to be able to overcome him by himself; for he is but a weak man—a reed in comparison with yourself; you may bend him as you will."

"I was going to say," resumed Randall, "when you thus interrupted me, that, whilst you have engaged me to secure the possession of a man that I never saw, and know nothing about, you have not said a word about how I am to get him in my clutches, or where we are most likely to catch him, without the interference of passers-by, should he feel inclined to make a vigorous resistance, as doubtless he will."

"I only waited to learn whether you were still in the same resolute mood as when we first talked together on the subject," said the old man, bending his head cautiously over the table, and continuing, in a low, hoarse whisper: "I have accidentally learned that to-night he has had occasion to leave his ship, and come up to London, for the purpose of carousing with some of his old comrades. He will there drink freely—I am sure he will, for I know his habits well; and at eleven o'clock he will return by himself in a small boat to the ship, which lays down the river close by the Commercial Docks. What should prevent a brave and strong fellow, like somebody I know, from waylaying him in his solitary boat, and taking advantage of his helpless condition, by tying a handkerchief over his mouth, and throwing a rope round his hands, eh?"

"Humph!" mused Randall; "I can't say it's a business I much like; there is much risk, and little pay for it. Besides, what do you propose doing with him when he is in our power?"

"You know the old hovel in the marshes?" suggested Hawkins; "it is mine—my property altogether, and there is no one who would be likely to watch our proceedings or interrupt us in going thither. Let us keep him there for a few days, bound hand and foot, Mr. Randall, until he gives me up the wealth of which he has deprived me." And the speaker clenched his bony fingers as if already anticipating his revenge.

"You have a shrewd way of inventing a plan to get rid of a troublesome fellow," observed the bird-fancier, "but as I have gone so far in the matter, I don't like, at the last moment, shrinking back from rendering assistance, and the affair may as well be done and off our hands to-night as at any other time; so you may go comfortably home, my sly old fox, and leave me to snare this well-feathered owl that takes his flight to roost so long after sundown."

"Nay, I must go with you in the boat," quickly cried the miser; "I would not lose a jot of my revenge for worlds; I long to see him at my feet, prostrate and helpless, and to gloat upon the agony he will suffer when thus he finds himself shut up in darkness, and hears my voice calling upon him through the gloom for restitution of the plunder. Oh! it will be a glorious, noble triumph!"

"Well, I must say you seem to enter fully into the spirit of this business," continued Randall, noticing with interest the fitful gleam of passion that the features of his companion betrayed; "one would think you had been regularly educated as a kidnapper, you take to the profession so naturally. I don't ask you why you do all this, or what the fellow has done to you that you should take all this trouble about him, for that's no business of mine; but what I do want to know is, what sort of a person is he, that I may make no mistake about the matter, and know the kind of resistance I may have to encounter?"

"I will take care you have the right person," rejoined Hawkins; "I could distinguish him from others

even in the darkest night; and the first blow will disable him, for he is but a stripling—a lad—absolutely a mere boy compared with you; and he will have been drinking deeply besides, so that he must fall an easy adversary before a strong arm like yours. Ay, the gold I have hoarded up for years is now being squandered like drops of water by himself and his vile companions who assisted him in the theft;" and a deep groan at the thought of this extravagance followed the utterance of his speech.

"Then a stout rope or two will do the business," said Randall, in reply; "and I know a waterman down here who will lend me his boat for the purpose, by giving a fair return for the loan; but as it will not be dark till nearly ten o'clock, and we have to proceed down the river some distance beforehand, there is no time to lose."

"No! that's right," rejoined the old man, eagerly; "it must be done to-night, or it will perhaps be too late. He has taken his passage in a vessel bound for the West Indies, and to-morrow his boxes, containing my hard-earned property, will be placed on board; I heard him say so himself. When we have once secured him, we can compel him to write an order to give them up to me—to me, the real owner of the treasure he has stolen."

"But how does it happen he sleeps to-night on board, when the vessel don't sail for a day or two yet?" inquired Randall, rising from his seat and preparing to depart.

"Hush! not so loud, I prithee," remonstrated the miser; "he has a friend in the captain, who generally returns with him from town, as, indeed, they have done for the last week; but this evening the captain will be detained in the Borough till a late hour, and consequently *he* will return alone in the captain's boat. You see I have taken care to learn beforehand all the particulars necessary."

"Then if you are going to join me in this night-journey, the sooner we start the better," cried Randall impatiently, and calling for a dram of brandy each as they passed the bar, the two confederates left the tavern, and hardly exchanging another word as they went along, they passed through the narrow lanes abutting on the river, and made their way direct to the slippery declivity of Limehouse Stairs.

Here Randall, as he had anticipated, encountered the waterman of whom he was in search; and hinting to him aside that he was engaged in a little smuggling transaction, in which they had frequently of late been concerned together, he found no difficulty in obtaining, by a satisfactory pecuniary arrangement between them, the loan of the waterman's wherry until the following day.

It was now twilight. Through the hazy, copper-coloured canopy of smoke that overhung the city, a few bright stars, twinkling with a soft and mellowed radiance, came peering out; and where the rays of sunset lingered in the horizon, a faint glow was still apparent, throwing out the broken mass of buildings in strong relief against the evening sky. Steamers were returning crowded with holiday-making passengers from Gravesend and Greenwich, and the lively strains of the band of itinerant minstels on board rang out clearly on the warm summer air; white-bait parties were hastening back to their destination, bargemen were clumsily struggling home through the intricacy of the pool; sailors lounging lazily over the sides of newly-arrived vessels were thinking of getting ashore for the night; and through that maze of crowded shipping, where the masts began to mingle indistinctly into one confused mist of shadowy forms, the hum of commercial activity that had gone on without cessation through the day was stilled into a sombre and dreamy repose.

Randall, whose contraband experience had made him a complete adept at the sculls, had urged the boat along amid these scenes for the distance of nearly three miles, when turning to Hawkins, who sat wrapt in profound meditation at the stern, he observed that, as it was then high water and the tide would begin to turn in a few minutes, he would run the boat under shelter of the growing darkness into a little creek by the Isle of Dogs, and there await the coming up of the other. He added, as he pushed his way along the bank with the scull, thereby working the boat on almost noiselessly in the direction indicated, that, as it was probable their expected victim would be nearly incapacitated from the management of the boat, and would allow it to drift on with the tide, the very same course would be naturally pursued, and that the attack could thus be made with greater secrecy and caution.

This little indentation of the land where they had found a temporary concealment was peculiarly suited to their design, from the command it gave them of the river, as well as from the facilities it afforded them for escaping unobserved.

The bank, sweeping round at this point with a sudden curve, was thickly overgrown with long grass, and a group of pollards growing by the ledge formed in addition a complete shelter, for in the shadow they cast upon the water no object could be clearly distinguishable. Here, mooring the boat by driving his scull into the soft yielding sward, and fastening it with a spare piece of rope, Randall quietly took a short pipe from his pocket, and began to smoke, shading, however, the flickering light in the bowl with his hand, to prevent it attracting the unwelcome notice of a chance passenger. The old man, whose thoughts were apparently too much engrossed by the impending occurrence to enable him to beguile the time in like manner, remained crouched up in one corner, leaning over the stern, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the river, striving to penetrate the gloom in search of one familiar object.

They had waited thus about two hours, when the measured plashing of a solitary pair of sculls dipping into the water quickened the attention of the listeners, and the vague outline of a boat was discerned making its way, as Randall had predicted, close to the spot where they lay concealed. Hastily detaching the rope, and seizing the implement to which it had been secured, the bird-fancier pushed off the boat into the stream; and determined by the impatient exclamation of Hawkins, who declared it to be the one which they sought, he guided his course so accurately by the faint rays of the starlight, that in a few minutes the two boats were drifting rapidly with the tide in contact with each other.

"That is him! hold him—keep him fast!" cried the miser, exulting at the approach of his victim, and nerving himself with almost superhuman strength for the encounter.

Randall, without uttering a word, calmly surveyed the chances of their mutual position; and then, watching his opportunity, he leaped into the boat that was now closely grating against his own, and flinging himself upon the form of the passenger, managed his attack so suddenly, that hardly a cry for aid had escaped him before his assailant had thrown a handkerchief over his face, and bound his arms with the rope, which he

had twisted into a tight noose. There was a subdued, stifled exclamation of alarm, and one powerful effort at extrication; but the strong, iron arm of the bird-fancier, who grasped him as if in a vice, completed the success of the encounter, which inebriation had previously made more certain.

"Quick, quick—the sculls!" cried Randall, in a rapid whisper to his companion, who, deeply interested in the scene, had kept as close as the impelling force of the current allowed; "the other two have gone overboard—confound them!"

"Are you sure that you have him secure?" anxiously asked the old man, as, nearing the boat, he gave his associate the assistance required. "Is the danger over?"

"Ay, over—to be sure it is. Here somebody lays at least as flat down in our boat as a good ringing blow could make him. But come, climb over into it yourself, and leave me to manage the other; we must make use of tide, and sculls too, if we are to get out of sight before daybreak."

Managing, not without some difficulty and risk, to make good his footing, the old man was transferred to the boat, where the object of his deeply-cherished enmity was stretched completely senseless; and Randall, who proved himself skilled in all the details of the waterman's craft, attached the wherry behind, and plied the sculls vigorously, to bear them beyond the chance of observation.

With such rapidity and dexterity the attack and capture had been accomplished, that the whole occurrence had not occupied more than a few minutes, and besides a foreign steamer and a few colliers that were going down with the morning tide, nothing passed them on the way likely to excite alarm. On—on they went, past Woolwich, where the lights from the town came forth in picturesque contrast with the deep shadowy gloom of the country beyond; on by those dreary wastes of marshes that stretch along by the Essex shore; and then turning round by Barking Creek, they tied the boats to the stump of an old tree, and prepared to disembark at the place of their destination.

The barn, or hovel, for such it had become through the neglect of the owner and the different use to which it was now applied, was situated but a short distance from the entrance to the creek where they then were; and the conveyance of their captive was consequently rendered a matter of little difficulty.

Accordingly Randall threw the inanimate form of the stranger on to his own shoulders, and, preceded by Hawkins, strode through the dewy fields of high rank grass, until the low stone walls of an outbuilding that had evidently been once a portion of a large farm, long ago demolished, now rose in palpable outline before them. Unfastening the door with a key he detached from some secret pocket, and bestowing a significant glance at his companion, as if in remembrance of some past event associated with the spot, Hawkins led the way into the barn, which was of moderately large dimensions, and illumined by a small window near the top. Here, as the first streaks of dawn rendered objects more and more distinct, Randall saw that the person he had attacked and secured was manifestly no match for his herculean strength, being a slim and youthful individual of apparently twenty years of age. A heavy blow, inflicted accidentally in the struggle by the scull as it had been struck out of his hands, had left a strong livid mark across the forehead, and was the cause of the protracted insensibility into which he had fallen. It was on this pallid inanimate form that the morning sun now shed its earliest beams, as Hawkins and Randall, anxious to retrace their steps to the watersido, left the barn, and resigned this solitary inmate to his fate.

CHAPTER IV.

LIFE IN THE STREETS.

On the morning after his arrival in London, Henry Thornton, with the recollection of the mysterious events of the preceding night diverted by the novelty of the objects by which he was surrounded, found himself traversing the streets of the metropolis on his way to a merchant in the city, for whom he had obtained from his former employer a letter of introduction.

The myriad movements of the restless inhabitants, the throng of the thoroughfares, the teeming magnificence of the shops, the lively bustle of the roads rife with vehicular animation, the harsh, jarring contrast of the rich and poor so constantly brought into painful juxtaposition, and the contemplation of a mighty multitude, compelled diurnally to struggle for existence, grappling with life itself, and striving by means, fair or foul, by honesty or thievery, to obtain the wherewithal to sup or sleep, formed a never-failing source of interest. In one place he saw a poor attenuated figure in all the tawdry mockery of spangled belt and flimsy fleshings, twisting himself in every possible form of unnatural contortion to procure a simple crust of bread and cheese; in another, the satin-slippered daughters of opulence, descending from their softly-cushioned carriages, were bartering for needless luxuries that which would have lightened the hearts of thousands by whom the silken robes were fashioned. Here hurried by the accoucheur, there the undertaker; now rattled past a railway omnibus, bearing its passengers away to the bright green fields and fresh atmosphere of the country; anon rolled onward from a police-office the prison van, to consign its inmates to the dismal cells of the county gaol; some feasting, amid the blaze of glittering chandeliers, on the affluent delicacies of a rich man's banquet—others dropping silently down through the darkness into the cold bed of the ever-murmuring river; one moment the newspaper-boy, laden with the morning journals, carelessly whistles as he deposits that which brings tidings of wealth or wretchedness to hundreds—and the next we hear the summons of the imperturbable postman, heedless whether the intelligence he brings be that of fortune or failure, delight or death; at one corner a boy has his eye on a pocket, in readiness to abstract its contents—in another the policeman has his eye on the boy, prepared to punish him for the theft; and all these various movements, this constant revolution of the great and little wheels of the marvellous machinery of social existence, are put in motion by one mainspring—*bread*. The brain must provide for the wants of the body; and the mere daily attrition of the coats of the stomach is an event sufficiently important to stimulate the universal struggle.

There is no place where a sense of loneliness steals more surely and solemnly upon the stranger than in the streets of London, where, in the consciousness felt that, amidst the thousands of human faces that hurry past us, we are not likely to encounter one that is familiar, the perception of our own individual insignificance becomes painfully intense. The atom is absorbed in the aggregate, as the grain of sand by the sea-shore is imperceptible amongst the countless mv-

riads of particles around it; and we feel that, even in the midst of a teeming population, we stand alone, isolated from our fellow-creatures, and yet drifting along the same tide, in which we might be wrecked and overwhelmed without our fate exciting the slightest interest, or our absence eliciting the least regret.

Deeply did Thornton feel this, as, guided by the efficient directions he had received, he pursued his progress towards the city, carelessly jostled on his way by the apparently interminable stream of passengers that flowed onward from the busy scene of commerce. To him every thing was novel; and his admiration and wonder were being continually excited by the endless variety of objects his eye encountered along the line of traffic that he passed. Even the display of the shop-windows had presented such an irresistible temptation from time to time, involving delays so long and so frequent, that, though he had left his abode early in the morning, the day had far advanced before he had reached the place to which his footsteps had been originally directed. It was, therefore, not without some degree of apprehension that the office might be closed and his journey rendered fruitless that he now quickened his pace; and having ascertained by inquiry the exact locality of the merchant's counting house, Henry Thornton turned down one of those alleys that form a connecting link between Cornhill and Lombard Street, and sedulously proceeded to examine the names conspicuously labelled on the doors around, in search of the one that corresponded with the superscription on his letter.

Nothing could be more gloomy than the appearance presented by the city court in which Thornton now found himself. The houses that encircled it on every side but one, where a narrow outlet communicated with the noisy thoroughfare beyond, shot up in lofty sombre stories, with huge windows, so encrusted with dust, that there was no need of blind or curtain to conceal transactions that took place in the apartments to which they gave light. These buildings were all of them divided into offices, and with that economy of room so characteristic of a region where every inch of space has its corresponding value, even the landings were generally abridged of their fair proportions, that a narrow tenement might be occupied by a small stockbroker, whose business being more limited might require less room for its management. On one of these houses, after much patient investigation of the various appellations that, inscribed on the doorway, indicated the possessors of the different rooms above, Thornton at last succeeded in meeting with the name of "Morton," and he accordingly at once proceeded up the broad wooden staircase to the floor mentioned in the inscription as having that gentleman for its occupant.

Fully prepared as he had been by previous observation to abandon his old belief that the mighty magnates of commercial enterprise had establishments commensurate with the magnitude of their mercantile undertakings, the dingy walls and cheerless aspect of the place, as he ascended the successive flights of stairs, fairly took him by surprise. The apartments, so far as he could see by a door being open here and there along the passage, where the inmates were preparing to depart, were destitute of furniture, except that of the most ordinary official description, and there was no bustle to infuse that animation into the scene which he had expected to behold. Knocking at the outer door of one of these chambers, which bore upon it a repetition of the name below, Thornton was considering the best manner in which he could present himself whilst he awaited a response to his summons. There was, however, no reply; and when he again repeated his single rap it was with a louder tone, that sounded with a hollow reverberation through the entire structure. All still continuing silent, he concluded that, the period of business being over, the office had been closed for the day; and he was accordingly making up his mind to be earlier on the next morning, when the door of the next room opened, and a thin, sallow, elderly man, with his hat and gloves on, issued therefrom, and carefully locking up the apartment he had quitted, looked with an inquisitive glance at the stranger before him, and having ascertained that the brown paper parcel he carried under his arm was duly secured, commenced slowly descending the stairs. He had scarcely reached the landing-place, when, apparently entertaining the idea that the applicant for admission might be labouring under some mistake as to the position of the office, he retraced his steps, and addressed Thornton in the most deferential manner he could assume.

"Pray, sir, are you waiting to see any person in particular?" inquired the spare individual, lifting up his spectacles as he spoke, to obtain a clearer view of the features opposite his own.

Thornton briefly explained that he was desirous of an interview with Mr. Morton, and that he presumed the merchant had left his place of business for the day, from the appeal he had made remaining unanswered.

"Ah, sir," returned the other, in a tone of lamentation, "poor Mr. Morton has gone to render up his accounts elsewhere. We received this morning the melancholy intelligence of his death. Some severe losses he had lately in his railway speculations, and the bankruptcy of a firm that stood deeply indebted to him, all preyed upon his mind, and hastened the short illness he had to a fatal termination."

"This is indeed a calamity I little expected," said Thornton, as he mused upon the effect it would have on his future prospects; "I have travelled some distance from the country on purpose to present a letter from a friend of his, which would have ensured me, I have reason to believe, an engagement in Mr. Morton's office."

"Humph! poor young man!" soliloquised rather than exclaimed the thin individual; "come from the country—long way—reach London—search of employment—sad disappointment—go back again—I understand;" and amidst these broken sentences the speaker rubbed his hands nervously together, and in temporary forgetfulness of his parcel, suffered it to fall upon the floor; whereupon the string snapped, and revealed the contents, which consisted of a strange jumble of pens, blank paper, and some broken sandwiches, evidently the fragments of the morning lunch.

"Allow me," cried Thornton, smiling at the incongruous collection, as he promptly restored the packet to its owner; "I have the advantage of being somewhat younger than yourself."

The old clerk, embarrassed at the discovery, ventured upon some stammering explanation of the necessity that existed for leaving no temptation to the rats and mice that infested these old buildings, and poured forth reiterated thanks at the same time to Thornton, whose courtesy had manifestly made a most favourable impression on his mind.

"And pray, if you do not think me too bold, my young friend, may I inquire whether, being thus disappointed, you have any prospect of obtaining other

occupation?" asked the clerk, whose manner showed that he had already felt a great interest in the fortunes of his new acquaintance.

"Only what paying some attention to the newspaper advertisements may procure for me," returned Thornton.

The old man shook his head ominously as he observed: "A very slender chance that, I am afraid; I never knew a place yet advertised as vacant without at least some hundred applicants being ready to supply the demand. Every body comes to London when they can get nothing to do elsewhere, and, consequently, there are thousands eager to snatch at every opportunity of getting a livelihood that may occur. But come, don't be down-hearted about what I've told you," added the clerk, seeing Thornton had already felt his spirits depressed by the communication that had been made; "I think I know of a situation that will just suit you if you are disposed to make the application."

"Indeed, I shall be most anxious to do so," rejoined Henry; "though I hardly know how I shall be able to recompense you sufficiently for this most unexpected kindness."

"There, say no more about that," returned the other; "I have taken a liking to you; and though I have only seen you for a few minutes, would do any thing I could to serve you. You put me in mind of a young brother I had that came up from the country, like yourself, to get employment in London. I *did* get it for him, poor fellow, but, somehow or other, he wasn't seasoned as I was to the smoky air of the city, and the confinement didn't suit him. He grew gradually weaker and paler every day; and at last he died. He lies buried in the churchyard yonder, which you may see from one of the upper windows. I often think upon his fate," added the old clerk with a deep sigh, "and reckon up how many I have seen go off in the same way."

"You have, then, been yourself some years in London, I presume," remarked Thornton, wishing to divert the course of conversation.

"Years! I have passed my lifetime within its boundary—an existence has ebbed away between the New Road and Cornhill, for when I leave here I go to my lodging, and when I leave that it is to come here; so that I have seen little else for forty years. Once indeed, I was persuaded, when the steamers first came up, to go as far as Greenwich for change of air; but as I got into the park, the quietude and stillness of the place completely overpowered me, and it was quite a relief to get back once more to the noise and bustle of the city. Since then I have never ventured further than Islington, when I wanted a Sunday walk."

"And have you always retained your present position during that time?"

"Oh, dear no; I came into the office as errand-boy, nothing to do but sweep out the room and run of messages. Then, finding I could read and write a little, the head clerk gave me some more important letters to deliver, and at last I got promoted to a stool and desk in the office myself; and when the head clerk left, I got his place, which I have kept since, through every change that has occurred in the firm of Freeman and Jakes, stock and share brokers, whose business, I am proud to say, owes much of its present importance to the care and attention that has been paid to it by Mr. Caleb Crummins, the name which I have the honour to bear."

"I have so little doubt of it," said Thornton, "that if you will favour me with your company for a few minutes to the next tavern, I shall be happy to offer you something that will enable us to drink to our better acquaintance."

In the propriety of this Mr. Crummins, with some preliminary show of hesitation, at last acquiesced; and descending the staircase, the clerk led the way to a quiet public-house in the neighbourhood, that stood—as city public-houses generally do—somewhere in the depths of a dark narrow court, where none but those acquainted with the peculiar characteristics of such establishments could possibly suppose it to exist. Into the long avenue that presented itself beyond the doors of this civic tavern the clerk plunged boldly, as one thoroughly conversant with the topography of its windings, and closely followed by Thornton, pursued his way to the end of the passage, that, dimly illuminated by a gas-lamp at the end, was reeking with the odours of chops and steaks, evidently being submitted to a culinary operation for the benefit of sundry hungry individuals who were seen in an adjoining apartment, begniling the time by alternately reading the newspaper and making premature havoc with the square wedges of bread that had been provided as concomitants of their repast. Entering a place that might have been mistaken for a capacious cupboard, had not a pompous inscription above of "Smoking Room" avouched to the contrary, they found themselves the only occupants, and Mr. Crummins accordingly taking possession of the corresponding two chairs, deposited himself in one, and signified to his companion that, unless he preferred the benches that were ranged round, he had better appropriate the other before more visitors arrived, among whom, it appeared, these extra luxuries formed not unfrequently a bone of contention.

A small window, which let in the rays by a few at a time, as if to show the value of the light that was being taxed so heavily, enabled the spectator to command an uninterrupted view of the back yard, in which the dust-bin, choked up by broken bottles, bones, and other rubbish, formed a striking object in the distance; and from one of the apertures beneath, a citizen rat, that had fattened himself on these refuse delicacies into a proper degree of aldermanic sleekness and obesity, was quietly occupied in the embellishment of his whiskers, giving that animation to the prospect which a painter would have desired as an essential feature. The walls were so embrowned with the effects of that fumigation practised diurnally within their limits, that not a vestige of their original colour remained, and from the smoke-encrusted ceiling, profusely dotted with fly-marks, a bilious-looking gas-pipe descended, which kept spluttering impatiently forth through the narrow burner, as if cherishing a rebellious spirit for having been kept burning there throughout the day for nothing.

"Nice, comfortable room this," ejaculated Mr. Crummins, whose ideas of comfort and elegance seemed of a very primitive nature; "if you would allow me to suggest the nature of our refreshment, I should hint at the peculiar celebrity of the stout that is here sold."

"Pray order what you please," said Thornton; "you must consider yourself as my guest entirely."

The waiter having been duly summoned, went out, and returned with a foaming pewter measure, containing the beverage that had been ordered.

"Permit me to offer you a sandwich," resumed Mr. Crummins, unfolding his brown-paper parcel, when the waiter, having received the money, had retired; "you will find them satisfactory eating, I assure you."

Thornton begged to decline on the plea of having already satisfied his appetite, but hoped that would be no obstacle to the clerk satisfying his own.

"Why, you see, the fact is," continued Mr. Crummins, "that I generally dine here, but having brought this morning some lunch to the office, which has not been quite disposed of, I am making the remainder supersede the necessity of my regular meal. The study of economy is one of the first things to which we in the city are called upon to pay attention."

"You alluded to some vacancy, I think, where it was possible my services might be found useful," observed Thornton, anxious to learn the nature of the communication Crummins had promised to make. "Your recommendation perhaps——"

"Would be of very little advantage to you, my young friend," interrupted the clerk. "The matter stands simply thus: to-day there called at our office a gentleman who came to transact some business with the firm of Freeman and Jakes. As he left the little room, which is Mr. Jakes's own, I overheard him say that he wanted a secretary or something of that kind, and that he should advertise for one in the *Times* of to-morrow. Now directly I saw you, it occurred to me that you would be the very one likely to suit him, and accordingly I should advise you to call upon him without delay—this very evening, if possible."

"But do you know his address?"

"Oh, yes; it was entered by me into the book this morning, and I remember it exactly. I'll pencil it down for you—'Mr. Fitzroy Greene, Manchester Buildings, Westminster.' There—you can't mistake—you can say you came from Freeman and Jakes, and I dare say that will be sufficient. He has just come into the possession of a large estate, I believe."

"This is really very kind of you, Mr. Crummins," said Thornton, folding up the direction and placing it in his waistcoat-pocket; "and an act of friendship like this to a stranger is one that, whether successful or not, will claim from me my warmest acknowledgments. I will go at once."

"Well, let me know how it has turned out, at all events, Mr.—Mr.—by-the-by, I have not the pleasure of knowing your name."

"Thornton."

"Dear me! that's very odd. Thornton! I have

some faint recollection of having known somebody of that name before, but it is so long ago that—Well, there, I won't detain you; I see you are anxious to be off; so good-bye, my young friend, and success attend you."

And as he said this he shook hands warmly at parting; and long after Thornton had left, the old clerk sat brooding over his pipe alone, absorbed in that peculiarly abstruse meditation which is usually denominated a "brown study."

Thornton, indeed, unused to the confined atmosphere which he had just been breathing, was glad to escape to the fresher air of the open street, and was not the less desirous of ascertaining the chances of that meeting with which accident had so strangely favoured him. He was not long, therefore, changing the scene of his adventures from the city to the west-end; and with a lightness of heart that he at least interpreted into a presentiment of success, he entered the aristocratic region of Parliament Street, which he was instructed would lead him near the locality to which he wanted to go.

CHAPTER V.

A NIGHT ADVENTURE.

At the back of Parliament Street, nearly at the foot of Westminster Bridge, on the Middlesex side, and reached by a short cut through the devious turning of Cannon Row, where the official oracle of the *London Gazette* receives its *imprimatur*, there will be found a cluster of houses terminated at the end by iron railings, through which an opening to the river affords a view of the smaller craft and barges that are moored upon its banks. The houses have a dull, genteel air about them, without any embellishment of bright paint or ornamental knockers, and being in the vicinity of the House of Commons, the incipient members of parliament who desire an economical abode, and the tribe of professionals with limited incomes and unbounded expectations that hover round the neighbourhood of the law courts, have here long fixed their temporary dwellings. The name given to this retired locality is "Manchester Buildings."

In an elegantly-appointed drawing-room of one of these houses, with a brightly-polished table before them, whereon the wine was circulating freely, were seated Mr. Fitzroy Greene and his former companion, Mr. Parkins. Their conversation had evidently been of a very cheerful and animated description, for besides the occasional peals of laughter that were indulged in at intervals by both, the wily agent had completely thrown aside that restless expression of cunning watchfulness which he generally assumed, and his countenance instead bore the stamp of a bland and self-satisfied benignity. His companion was lounging in an indolent, careless attitude, sipping the amber-coloured sherry, and smoking a fragrant cigar which he had just plucked forth from a box the footman had a few minutes before placed upon the table; and his easy, nonchalant demeanour showed that the cares of the world, exorcised by the magical influences of a good dinner, were not at that moment intruding on his thoughts or disturbing the agreeable tenor of his reflections.

"Capital sherry this, 'pon my word!" exclaimed Parkins, filling up his glass as he spoke; "your wine-merchant deserves immortal credit."

"Glad to hear it," rejoined Greene; "but *apropos* of credit, you must open an account for me at your banker's to-morrow."

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear sir; you can now control the expenditure of your own finances."

"And, by the way, Parkins, now I have set up for a dashing fellow upon town, I must have a snug little box somewhere in the country, and keep a brougham, you know."

"Of course, my dear sir, of course," returned the little man, taking snuff with great rapidity.

"It would be as well, too, if I could patronise the benevolent institutions a bit; that kind of thing gives a fellow a sort of *éclât*, you know; and I want to have my name among the list of vice-presidents."

"Then you have some ulterior object in view, I'll be bound," insinuated Parkins, with a sly glance at his companion.

"To be sure I have."

"And that is——"

"A secret, Mr. Parkins, that I intend most strictly keeping to myself."

"Very well, my dear sir, do as you please," pursued the agent, somewhat discomfited; "but remember, unless you confide in me, the advice I would readily give you cannot be imparted, and that consequently you lose the entire benefit of my experience."

"Psha! Parkins, you are so confoundedly cold," said Mr. Fitzroy Greene; "your frigid temperament is enough to freeze the spirit of the most sanguine. I would live all the year round in sunshine; and you would put the heart into an ice-pail, and treat it as you do champagne. Hang it, coldness may improve the wine, but it spoils the man."

"Ah, you will be so hasty, my dear Mr. Greene. There is no controlling you, no getting you to listen for a moment to what I have to say. Now it has occurred to me, that since I have been the means of placing a fortune in your possession, you might feel, perhaps, disposed to strengthen your position by uniting yourself to one whose income and station in society would be adequate to your own"—and the little man paused in his harangue to observe the effect of his suggestion.

"All depends upon the kind of person it may be," returned Greene. "I happen to have some peculiar tastes and inclinations of my own to consult, when I venture upon matrimony. I hardly know whether I should calmly resign myself to any but a countess, or some one of rank, at all events."

"Well, though I am not prepared to meet your views in that respect, my dear sir," continued Parkins, warming under the influence of the wine, "I can at least ensure you an introduction to a lady, whose beauty will command your admiration, and whose fascinating manners will complete the spell by which you will be enthralled. Her lips are coral, her teeth ivory; her cheeks carnations, and her eyes diamonds, that pierce you through and through. In fact, her charms would fire the soul of an anchorite, and her conversation would bewilder the mind of a philosopher."

"Come, Parkins, none of your etherial angels for me; you manufacture them as the poets do—cut them out of a cloud, with a moonbeam for a petticoat, and have them girdled with a rainbow, and kerchiefed with a piece of blue sky. I am content with a tangible, palpable, lovely woman, who has a form and mind in which passion is fed by sentiment, and whose fire is tempered with softness; just that kind of being, in short, that Rousseau could imagine, Byron describe, Titian paint, and Chantrey find for us in the enduring substantiality of stone."

"Your rhapsody, my good sir," remarked Parkins,

"has the merit, at least, of being singularly appropriate to the party I allnded to; but the felicity of your illnstrations indeed surprises me. I was unaware that you had been such an attentive student of literature and the fine arts."

"Hnmph!" added Greene, "if I had not been, it was not for want of opportunity; but have I never told you that I was at college for a few years in my youth?"

"Never!" exclaimed the agent, with some manifestation of surprise. "But knowing so little of your early life, of course my ignorance of that circumstance was excusable. You will remember that our acquaintance began bnt a short time back, and that when I first proposed the project I had in view you were in such a very different grade of society, that——"

"There, let us change the subject," interrupted his hearer. "Now, come to the point at once—what is it you would have me do?"

"Why, for my own part," replied Mr. Parkins, resuming his former oiliness of manner, "I do not see that you can do better than consider the matrimonial hint I have thrown out. It will give you that introduction to the higher circles which we want so much to sustain our pretensions, and from which, besides, you might otherwise be unjustly excluded."

"And the lady—who is she?"

"That, in return for a reservation upon your side, I must refrain from communicating until I know whether my proposal be accepted."

"Well, in a few days I will converse with you again on the subject; but fully understand, Parkins, that I still retain the right of having my actions unrestricted in this affair."

"Certainly, certainly," echoed that individual; "unrestricted, of course. You shall see her and judge for yourself. And now about those shares in the Manchester and Huddersfield line?"

"I went down this morning, as you suggested, to the share-broker, and secured them."

"Right; we shall have thus a command over the company, and after the ground has been bought, and our purposes answered, a sale can be easily effected."

"By the way, my business transactions seem to be accumulating so rapidly, that I was thinking of getting a clerk or secretary to manage that part of my correspondence; for to confess the truth, it is what I care about the least. Besides, it takes such a confoundedly long time to——"

Mr. Fitzroy Greene's remark was here interrupted by the arrival of the footman, who came with a note, which he handed to his master, and who added that there was a young man below from the firm of Freeman and Jakes, that wished to speak with him when at leisnre.

"Show him into the parlour, John," cried Mr. Greene, as he observed, "Something about those railway shares, I suppose." The servant left the room.

"And the note?" reminded Parkins, as he glanced inquisitively at the superscription.

"Oh, I know what that is," was the reply, "a box for the opera to-night that I sent my fellow to procure."

"Well, I must say you really know how to dispose of your funds," continued Parkins, somewhat sarcastically, as he rose to depart. "I shall see you again about that other little affair of ours, I suppose, on Thursday?"

"I shall be at your disposal for that evening."

"If I can bnt once fix him securely in my toils," muttered Mr. Parkins to himself, as, descending the staircase, he regained the outer street, "I shall then feel secure, and I cannot better ensure this than by putting my little plan into practice. I have no notion of being the ladder that raised him to his elevation, and then to be kicked down directly there is no further occasion for its services. I must have him, for my own security, entirely within my power, or else he must give way to the conditions which I have laid down."

And with these thoughts passing through his mind, and assuming increased importance as he reflected upon them more fully, the wily agent walked quickly onward in the direction of Charing Cross, where taking a Brixton omnibus, he was speedily conveyed to his villa in that favourite suburban district.

In the meantime Thorton had explained to Mr. Fitzroy Greene the purport of the business for which he came, and expressed his readiness to supply the presumed vacancy. A short series of questions ensued, and his qualification for the office to be assigned him having been pronounced sufficient to answer the expectations that had been formed, an engagement on trial was entered into immediately, and the following day was named as the one which he was to begin. The firm which Thornton had mentioned having been considered a recommendation in itself, all preliminary inquiries as to character and integrity were dispensed with, and he parted with his future employer delighted with the nature of his reception, and prepared on the following morning to execute the tasks that might be imposed to the best of his ability.

With his most sanguine expectations on the point of being realised, Henry Thornton now retraced his steps homeward, eager to communicate to his sister the tidings of his good fortune. It was besides growing dusk, and the anxiety he knew Emma would feel at his prolonged absence caused him to hurry onward with as rapid a progress as he could. As usual in such attempts to shorten distances by taking a cross turning instead of the direct road, his unacquaintance with the windings of the surrounding streets caused him to mistake the direction he should have pursued, and the increasing darkness of the evening assisted in misleading him still further. For some time he had wandered on, believing that every moment he should come to a landmark that was familiar to him, but the intricacy of the low neighbourhood in which he had now got fairly bewildered was momentarily becoming more difficult to unravel, whilst the repulsive appearance of its inhabitants did not at all contribute to impress him with a conviction of his personal safety.

Old women, wrinkled and haggard, with miserable garments hung loosely about them, bespeaking the lowest depths of poverty, were grouped together in one corner of the narrow thoroughfare; and sinister-looking men, with bloated, brutal features, the palpable produce of a long course of dram-drinking, were gathered round another; whilst young girls, whose very language made the heart shudder and the ears burn, were dressed in the tawdry trappings of their loathsome trade, preparing to go forth for the night, in much the same spirit as a tiger might be supposed to quit his evening lair and prowl about remorselessly for prey. The dwellings tenanted by these miserable people were wretched hovels, utterly unfit for human habitation, and devoid of every thing resembling comfort. The windows had paper thrust between the panes instead of glass; and the rafters, that had mouldered away piecemeal during a long series of years, now protruded through the dingy mortar, a

great portion of which had likewise fallen down in flaky fragments, and left the brickwork, bare and battered, open to the view. When, to the appearance presented by these frightful dens, the squalid filth round the doorways, and the noisome steuches that oozed forth from the courts around, are added to the scene, some faint idea may be gained of that sickening, repulsive region which was to be met with at this period behind that remarkable district still known by the appellation of "Palmer's Village," in Westminster.

Notwithstanding Thornton's earnest endeavours to extricate himself from this uninviting labyrinth of close and confined streets, his efforts proved fruitless, and he felt himself at last constrained to apply for assistance to a costermonger, who was stowing away for the night the remains of his unsold fruit into a damp and dreary cellar, which was also to serve for the vendor's sleeping apartment. Unconscious as to the extent of his mistaken progress, he had asked him for the nearest way to Oxford Street, in the belief that he had not gone far from the road which would bring him into that vicinity. As he put the question, a short-legged, long-bodied fellow, with a huge sandy head, shuffled slowly past, and, pausing by the costermonger's basket, as if accidentally, overheard the inquiry.

"I say, Jim," cried the costermonger to this individual, instead of giving any answer himself, "here's a cove wants to know the way to Oxford Street; d'ye think yer can d'rect him?"

"If the gen'l'man doesn't mind standing a drop of summut for the trouble, I dessay as how I can," was the response.

"I am quite willing, my good fellow, to make you some amends for your loss of time," returned Thornton, understanding the condition more by the gesture of the speaker than his words.

"You will have the goodness, then, jist to follow me," said his guide, bestowing a knowing wink on his comrade; "it's a nasty, ugly way to get there, sure enough, but perhaps yer honor won't mind that, as yer took so much trouble to get down here away from it?"

"I am a stranger in London, and have mistaken my road home," answered Thornton innocently, as he followed the footsteps of his cicerone. "The way in which these streets run from one into the other has quite bewildered me, and I am fully prepared to have some difficulty in getting out again."

"Ah! we are always werry partickler vith strangers," pursued his loquacious guide; "we takes such 'special care of them hereabouts, that after we've seen them home of a night, they makes a reglar piut of callin' upon us next mornin' to inkwire arter our health, and ask us to come and spend a day with them in return."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Thornton, who unsuspiciously applauded the courtesy that had dictated such a proceeding.

"Oh, Lor' bless you, that's nuffin," resumed the man, taking advantage of the reception which his garrulity met with; "I had last week the 'onor of escorting home the Markwis of Westminster, who, after his parlymentary dooties were over, vanted to see how his tenants got on down here, and the markwis was so werry much obleeged to me that he vouldn't let me go avay until I had a quartern of rum vith him at the Prince of Orange."

"I must really doubt that proof of the marquis's condescension," replied Thornton, whose credulity was not proof against the utterance of so bold an assertion. "You must have been imposed upon by somebody who assumed his name."

"Vell, here's the werry Prince of Orange I spoke about, and yer can ask them at the bar if it worn't a fact," retorted the communicative guide; "they sells unkimmon good spiritshus lickers here to be sure."

Finding the hint was too palpable to be disregarded, Thornton gave his companion an opportunity of putting it to the test, feeling that he was entirely dependent upon him, but inwardly resolving that, directly he encountered a policeman, he would dispense with his further services.

Accordingly they entered a low public house, which had, apparently, no necessity for the dazzling blaze of light that formed the prominent beacon of the gin-palaces seen in similarly populous neighbourhoods; for, beyond the rays diffused from a solitary gas-light, there was no visible indication of the house remaining open as a place of refreshment.

Around the bar were groups of ill-looking men and women, like those he had previously encountered, and the ominous glances they bestowed upon the new comers were sufficient to convince Thornton that he had need of all his firmness to sustain him in the predicament in which he found himself so inadvertently plunged. The guide, who seemed to be familiar to two or three of the party under the soubriquet of "Jim Gubbins," manifested no scruples at appearing in such society; and calling for a quartern of rum, for which he left Thornton to pay, he had the satisfaction of finding that the coin handed over for that purpose was taken from the depths of a moderately well-filled purse.

The spirit had been duly divided into two glass measures, when Thornton having momentarily turned aside to look at the motley groups around him, the other dexterously threw into one of these glasses the contents of a curiously enfolded paper.

"Come, sir, yer don't drink," cried Gubbins, tossing off his own allowance as if it had been so much water, to show, perhaps, the high estimation in which he held the liquor; "it will look proud of yer if yer don't go shares with us, and the landlord vill take offence at yer refusal, when the markwis has done him the honour of paying a personal visit."

Thus admonished, and afraid of the sarcastic sneers which his reluctance would provoke from the rest of the company, Thornton summoned his fortitude to the task, and drank the contents of the glass without hesitation; but, utterly unused to the effects of ardent spirits, he immediately repented of his incautious haste, and bitterly regretted that he had suffered himself to be thus persuaded.

For a sense of complete helplessness instantly overcame him. His brain was seized with a burning dizziness, and he would have sank prostrate on the floor had it not been for the prompt and vigorous support he received from his companion.

"Come, yer will feel all the better when yer gets out into the open air," observed his cicerone; "it *is* rayther strong, I must confess; but it is like mother's milk to me, who am more seasoned to it than you are I suspect."

Thus speaking, he led Thornton out into the dark and deserted street; and now the full effects of the drugged potation he had imbibed became manifest.

His ideas became confused and indistinct; he lost all conception of the position in which he was placed, and the neighbourhood through which he was being hurried. His vision failed to distinguish the objects that he passed; and his head, reeling with the fumes

of the spirit, seemed distracted by a tumultnons throhhing; whilst his ears were haunted with the vague combination of a myriad different sounds. Of what followed he had no recollection, for his stnpefaction was rendered complete by the rapidity with which he was dragged rather than led forward by the other; and their way now winding throngh the most devious and little freqnented alleys, he was speedily placed beyond the reach of rescue, even if he had recovered himself sufficiently to seek snch assistance.

Forcibly urging Thornton nnderneath a dark archway, and through a mass of mnd and rubhish which almost choked np the entrance, Gnbbins gave a pecnliar knock, accompanied hy a low shrill whistle, at a door on the left side, that ccmmnnicated with this dismal avenue; and directly it was opened, he pushed his victim within, the portal that gave them ingress being closed immediately afterwards behind them.

"Hallo!" cried a tall, powerful man, who had officiated as the porter, with a vhysiognomy that seemed expressly formed to prodnce an unfavourable impression hehind the bar of the Old Bailey, "what devil's lnck have yer had to-night, Jim? Where did yer pick np yer pigeon, or has he been plucked yet?"

"I'll tell yer all in good time—he's had a pretty strong dose of the doctor, and von't blab or bolt if ve leaves him to hisself a bit. Who's in the next room?"

"No one! Poll is out on the catch, and the old 'un has gone to smash the dnbs, so that ve can have a cosy chat all to ourselves as comfortahle as ninepence."

What particular amount of comfort this allegorical comparison might be presumed to indicate we are not prepared to state; hut as the two inmates of the den, after turning out the contents of Thornton's pockets, and having consigned him to the adjoining room, where he could sleep off his lethargy, began to draw sundry bottles and divers suhstantial refreshments from a cnpboard, it may be concluded the cultivation of the "creature comforts" formed an essential portion of its enjoyment.

"Two pounds seventeen shillin's and sixpence," calcnlated Gnhbins, displaying on the table the money he had got from the person of Thornton.

"Vell, there are vorse hanls than that, Mr. Gubbins," said the tall man, grinning his satisfaction at the amount displayed; "yer always had such vinnin vays with yer, that I don't vonder a young green 'nn should be prond of yer for a pal;" and a hoarse rongh langh from both crowned this interchange of compliments.

"There—that sqnares the reckoning between ns," said Gubbins, passing over to his comrade the eqnal share of the spoil, and secreting the rest in his own pocket; "and now tell us, as it's been some days since I've been among you, vot's been the game vhile I vos avay, eh?"

"The Phantom has been here again," said the other briefly, in reply.

"Vhot does yer mean by that?" inqnired Gubbins, opening his eyes to their full extent, bnt failing by that process to comprehend fully the natnre of the intelligence imparted.

"Vy, the Phantom," repeated the tall man more emphatically.

"And who's he?" pnrsued his interrogator; for whether he knew the real meaning of the term or not, his ideas only associated themselves with substantial beings of flesh and blood.

"To be sure," exclaimed the other, who, we may as well mention at once, was known hy the appellation of Slogger; "to be sure; I forgot he came vhilst you vos avay. But come; vhilst yer drink and smoke your pipe, I'll tell yer all I knows about him."

"Go on," cried Gnbbins, encouragingly; and Slogger did.

"Vell, abont three nights ago, there came here, in a large cloak and cap slonched down over his face, so as hardly the tip of his nose could be guessed at nnder it, a man whom none of ns had seen before, and about whom nobody knew nuffin. He said Bill Simmons, who he met at Liverpool, and who yer know vos lagged abont six months since, had told him all about this crib, and those who were mixed np in it; and sartin snre, he seemed to know all the ins and onts of the game vell enongh. Ve fonght shy at first, and made no friends of him, for he vos a strange, ont-of-the-vay kind of cove, and ve set him down as a trap; but vhen he vent over to the hig 'nn, and vhispered snmmnt in his ear, my eyes! yer shonld have seen Bill's face. It vent all colonrs at vonce, like a boiled rainbow."

"And vhot vos it he said?" inqnired the anxions listener.

"Ha! that vos a secret he wonldn't tell to no von; but it must have been snmmnt partic'lar, for it made him arterwards as soft as possihle; and he told us vhotever the gen'l'man vonted he vos to have, as it vos all right, and he vos von of the right sort."

"Go on," pnrsued Gubbins, knocking the ashes ont of his pipe, and stimulating his informant with another nod of encouragement; "vhot happened next?"

"Vell, he then asked if he could have any crown-pieces; and if so, how mnch. So Bill brought him in a bagful he had been making on the day hefore; and the cove bought them all, and paid for them in as good gold as ever you seed. He then said he shonld vont some more, and could he have them the next night; which Bill said in course he could. So next night he came and had another hnndred, and to-night he vos to come a gain and have his last. I've been a vaiting for him some time, and I thought it vos him vhen yon tumbled np with the pigeon."

"Vhot can he vont vith snch a lot of them at once?" asked Gnbbins, thonghtfnlly speculating on what he had heard.

"That's vot ve vonted to know; bnt there ain't much chance, it seems, of finding it ont. Ve pnt Poll on his track, to see vhere he vent to, bnt she lost sight of him each night in the Cornwall Road; and she swears he must have gone down a gas-pipe, to have mizzled so suddenly. Bnt, howsomever, as no von knows vhere he comes from, vhere he goes to, nor vhot he is, ve calls him the Phantom, and——"

Three distinct knocks at the outer door suspended the sentence.

"That's him!" cried Slogger, starting np; "and now yer shall see him yonrself."

As he spoke the hnge bar slnng across the doorway was removed, and throwing open the heavy wooden portal, a fignre in a cloak, with a cap drawn down over the featnres, exactly as Slogger had described, entered with a firm and undaunted tread. It was the mysterious visitor on whom the coiners had bestowed the strange *soubriquet* of The Phantom.

"Have you the amount I wanted in readiness?" he abruptly asked, in a low, hoarse voice, the eyes of the speaker evidently wandering suspiciously towards the form of Gnbbins, whom he had not seen before, and who was now sitting apparently nnconcerned at the end of the room.

"This is the bag that Bill left with me to give you,"

was the reply; and then, noticing the wavering glance of the unknown, Slogger added, "that's only Jim Gubbins, a pal of ours; yer needn't mind him."

The Phantom—for that supernatural appellation it will be convenient to preserve for a time—drew the candle presented by the smasher nearer to the bag, and proceeded to examine its contents, as he spread them forth on the low, ricketty table. By this movement, some rays of light fell upon his countenance, and enabled Gubbins, who was watching him attentively, to note enough of the expression to serve sufficiently for a future recognition.

It was one of those faces, indeed, that, when once seen, are not very readily forgotten. The eyes, of keen and piercing brilliancy, were overhung by thick, dark eyebrows, which gave them the appearance of being deep and sunken; the nose was arched and prominent; and the coarse unshaven chin communicated a wild and haggard look to the features, that were now thrown into strong relief by the flickering light. The shrewd observer had scarcely time to make this rapid survey, before the stranger concluded his task, pushed back the candle, and, satisfied with the result, drew a few pieces of gold from his purse, and gave them to Slogger, in exchange for a receipt, which had been made out in readiness.

"I suppose I can now leave," said the mysterious visitant, moving towards the door.

"Not without giving up a few more of these shiners that I heard chinking within that purse just now," cried Gubbins, starting from his position, and throwing his athletic form before the doorway to intercept the other's departure.

"No," responded his companion, who had previously directed a glance towards the ruffian, which, as we have seen, had been quickly interpreted and understood. "Ye let's no von out of here vithout knowing vhere they go to, much less vhen they carries such full weight vith them."

"Then you persist in hindering me," exclaimed the stranger fiercely, the words coming thick and furiously between his clenched teeth. "Beware, I come not into such places as this unarmed, and if you dare to impede my progress I have a short but simple way of settling the question."

The cool determination with which this was said, as the speaker withdrew two small pocket-pistols from beneath his cloak, now thrown back, and displaying a thickset muscular figure, and the threatening action by which it was accompanied, produced a visible effect on the couple of ruffians, who hesitated to attack so powerful an antagonist.

"Open that door instantly," demanded the unknown, enforcing with a pistol in each hand the command that he thundered forth in a stern and peremptory tone.

"Vell, don't be in such a hurry about it," grumbled Slogger, as he shuffled back the bolt; "ve vos only joking vith yer. There, don't yer see ve only vonted to try vhot sort of a feller yer vos?—that's all."

"Such experiments may turn out more dangerous than you think for," added the stranger, quietly; and he had turned round to face the door, when Gubbins, who had glided away from the threshold, sprang upon him from behind, and with a quick and sudden action pinioned his arms so as to prevent any possibility of using the pistols.

"Now then, Slogger, snatch the snarlers, and grab the gilt!" cried the robber, holding his victim tightly in his grasp, despite the powerful struggles with which the savage assault was resisted. "If ve don't find out who he is this time, it shan't be our fault," he continued, keeping his iron limbs fixed in this advantageous position, whilst his accomplice, having wrenched the pistols away, was next proceeding to plunder.

"Help, help! Villains, would you strangle me?" gasped the unknown, as his assailant, griping him like a vice, had drawn down the cloak, so that the clasp, pressing against his throat, was nearly choking him.

But the cry of the supplicant was unheeded, and the aim of the cowardly assaulters would have been doubtless accomplished, had not at that instant the door been forcibly thrown open, and their design interrupted by the appearance of a man whose look and manner immediately quelled the fray.

The new comer, whose timely entrance relieved the stranger from all apprehension for his safety, was a sinister looking individual of stern and resolute aspect, Broad and capacious shoulders, a chest of immense solidity, and a frame of that sinewy build that seems alike to defy blows and fatigue, assisted in procuring him that deference and respect from his associates that he insisted upon from his position. He was attired in a dark velveteen shooting-jacket, worn over a plush waistcoat, of faded texture, and his legs were encased in strong moleskin trousers. A rough fur cap was set jauntily on his head; and his hair, matted and twisted, streamed out in thick brownish masses from beneath the rim. It was precisely one of those figures that in daylight one would have met as a sort of half-groom, half-poacher, and that by night one would have preferred, perhaps, not meeting at all.

"Slogger, Gubbins,—what means this?" demanded the astonished and unexpected witness of this attack, and alternately conveying his inquiry to each of the personages named; "what devil's mischief are you after here, that I no sooner turn my back than you fall at loggerheads with my best customer? You will excuse this little freedom of their's, I hope," pursued the speaker, who was known sometimes briefly as "Bill," but more generally by the descriptive epithet of "the old 'un," which latter name he enjoyed as an equivalent to "governor," being, in his official capacity, owner of the tenement in which the coining was carried on. "You will excuse their rough ways, sir; they arn't used to genel'men, and they never will be."

As these reproaches were uttered, the two discomfited members of the gang slunk moodily away, muttering threats against their leader; and the stranger, re-arranging his apparel, that had somewhat suffered in the struggle, took the opportunity to exchange a few words with the new comer.

"This," he whispered hurriedly, "will be my last visit here, but not the last amount I shall require. Can I depend upon you?"

"Bill Saunders never broke faith with man yet," was the reply; "and with you there's a strong reason why he shouldn't. What my comrades do I can't be answerable for; they have a spice of the wild beast in their composition, which makes them at times savage as wolves, though they mean well, and are true and trusty. But you were speaking of another supply?"

"Ay! I shall want a thousand shillings cast in your best style."

"Phew! but it's a large order—why where do you find the means to smash 'em?"

"That concerns not you, my friend," replied the unknown. "I told you at our first meeting I had my own secret as well as *your's*," he added with emphasis; "and as I pay well for what you do, there need be no reason to inquire further."

"Well, that's true," rejoined the coiner, "and I know you couldn't have come to a better shop for what yon wanted. Finer work never left the die than that I have turned ont for you; but when is the stuff to be got ready?"

"In a week from this time," answered the stranger.

"And where is it to be brought?" asked Saunders; "for you know it will make a heavy package, and it ain't the sort of thing that one would like to find a blne-bottle buzzing abont."

"Let me see," mused the unknown; "it mnst be moved away from here by daylight, or suspicions will be roused. I have it!—the very place," he continued, after a slight pause of consideration, and then added, inquiringly, "You will have the coins in a box, tightly corded, and your messenger will have the appearance of a porter—will he not?"

"To be sure he will, as, for both our sakes, I intend to be myself the carrier," said Saunders.

"So mnch the better; bring the box, then, to the Elephant and Castle at dusk—which it will be by the time you get there—and yon will find me, as the clock strikes nine, in readiness to receive it."

"Good; and the parcel is to be brought——"

"This night week."

"I shall be ready," replied the coiner; and he was about to again apologise for the roughness of his assistants, when the ntterance of feeble groans, and the sound of a person moving in the next apartment, caught the attention of both.

They listened as if by mntnal consent, and as yet almost doubtful of the reality of that which had startled them; bnt the faint movements were renewed, the half-nttered cry repeated, and the vague belief became then certainty.

Snatching the light off the table, and hastening to the next room, the coiner, followed by the man called the "Phantom," found stretched upon the ground, half awakened from his drug-engendered lethargy, the victim of the narcotic which Gnbbins had administered. His stupefaction was still, however, so complete as to render him nnconscious of what was passing; and his head, turned towards the floor, was resting heavily and drowsily on his arm.

"My life for it!" exclaimed the coiner, with an oath, "this is some of that infernal Jim's handiwork; I know, one of these days, he'll bring us into trouble through his confounded mischief. He's a countryman, I see, and has been well cleared out, too," he observed, critically rising the inverted pockets of the slumberer, whose somnolency was deep and profound; "but we must get him away from here, or he will know rather more when he wakes than I care about."

Stooping down to raise the senseless form of the youth on to his own brawny shoulders, the coiner had brought by this action the face of the sleeper into the full glare of the light; and no sooner had this alteration of position been effected than a sudden exclamation of surprise burst from the lips of the stranger.

"How is this? Do you know him?" interrogated Saunders, noticing that this revelation of the slumberer's countenance had produced a sympathetic change in that of the looker-on.

"Yes, well!" ejaculated the "Phantom," with some indication of embarrassment, "that is, I am acquainted with his family."

"Ha! that's fortunate," returned the coiner, "since you can now take care of him. He will be all right a conple of hours hence. I saw what was the matter with him at a glance."

"This is our second meeting," mnttered the unknown to himself, gazing abstractedly on the face of Thornton, "and it is as strange as was the first. The likeness is indeed wonderful."

"Yon seem rather struck with the idea of finding him in this crib," remarked Saunders, misunderstanding the source of his companion's fixed attention, "but as it's growing late it would be as well to consider what's to be done with him, for it will be some time yet before he can walk."

"His road and mine partly lie together," answered the stranger, "and I will see him safe—at least from further harm. We can get a cab at the end of the street, and as soon as he has recovered sufficiently to walk that distance we will depart."

"Then I'll find a little amusement whilst yon wait," said the coiner, prodncing a glass and a bottle of spirits from an adjoining cnpboard; "in half an hour, if he don't know what he's about, yon'll be yet able to set him firm on his legs, and that will be some help towards getting him homeward."

With this determination to employ the intervening time, the two began to appropriate the contents of the coiner's spirit-case, which was kept tolerably well supplied. Gubbins and his companion, disgusted, as was supposed, with the way in which Saunders had thwarted them, had both retired to a public-house adjacent, and the mannfacturer of spurious coin, and his mysterious customer, had therefore the habitation to themselves. The conversation that passed between them it is unnecessary to detail. The coiner dwelt chiefly on the events of his past life, and the stranger carefully avoided any reference to the antecedents of his own. As soon as Thornton, therefore, exhibited signs of returning animation, he was taken by the unknown away from the vile neighbourhood into which he had been entrapped, and the casual accommodation afforded by a returning cabriolet, restored him about an hour afterwards, under the same escort, to his own home.

The next morning Thornton had but a confused recollection of what had passed. The baneful effects of the drugged liquor had left a feverish headache behind, and the memory, as if it still laboured under its stupefying influence, failed to render back a clear account of what had transpired. He had indistinct remembrances floating mistily through his mind of the proffered glass, the fear of ridicnle that had urged him to drink, the insensibility that had followed, and then, as in a dream, the hum of voices in conversation; the rattling progress of the vehicle that had borne him to his own door, the fresh air that had reinvigorated his frame and recalled his scattered senses, the alarmed appearance of his sister, who, through that weary night, had been anxiously awaiting his return, and the whirl of thonghts and images which had encompassed him as he sank into repose. But through all this, and so infusing itself into every incident of that memorable night as to be inseparable from each, there was the recollection of that phantom face that had glared upon him in the reflection of the mirror, and which, as a dimly-shadowed embodiment of one familiar to him in years gone by, he had felt as if destined to exercise a mysterious influence over his destiny. Vague and undefined though his ideas were, he yet could almost fancy those well-recognised features had been again brought before him, haunting him in the visionary hours he had spent, and bending down upon him those eyes of snake-like fascination, until he recoiled from their gaze with a thrill of shuddering horror. Had this been so, or was a nightmare of strange and terrible

intensity mocking him with the fearful resuscitation of the spectres of the past?

From meditations such as these he was roused by a summons from the cheerful voice of his sister, and at the same time that he found his purse had disappeared, and of which he judged it prudent to say nothing, he was reminded that his appointment in Manchester Buildings that morning was at least not to be numbered among the illusions of the last twelve hours.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET CONCLAVE.

DISENGAGING ourselves for a short time from the throng of incidents that have so rapidly accumulated around us at the very outset of our narrative, we must now request the company of the reader to a place with which, by name at least, he cannot be unacquainted.

Though situated in the gayest and most opulent quarter of the metropolis, with the stream of fashionable equipages and commercial traffic constantly permeating the adjacent thoroughfares, the street itself has a look singularly quiet, gloomy, and uninviting.

The passengers who are encountered therein wear an aspect of dull and formal gravity, as if imbued with the pervading characteristics of the place. Each seems to be bearing within his breast some secret of engrossing importance on which the prosperity of the nation may depend, or in which the fate of empires may be involved. The careless lounge of the patrician idler, and the steady, onward haste of the city man of business are never to be met with in its precincts. During the time parliament is sitting the occasional glimpse of government messengers flitting through the street and its neighbouring avenues gives a transitory animation to the scene, but it soon subsides into its inherent condition of dreary grandeur, and the eye seeks in vain along the range of lofty and massive structures for some relief to the cold and unbroken uniformity that prevails.

Yet here, in this apparently dull and sombre retreat, the cares of state press heavily upon the ministerial brow. Hence are fulminated the decrees that may sway the fortunes of courtiers afar off, and in its vast and busy chambers are projected the astute and influential plans that affect the legislature of our own. A voice from Downing Street has its echo at the antipodes.

To a spacious apartment situated in this important region the scene now changes. Before a table of large dimensions, covered with green baize, was the Secretary of State for the Home Department, earnestly absorbed in the examination of some important papers that had just been submitted to him for perusal. His countenance wore a look of extreme anxiety, and the accumulation of letters, enclosures, and despatches that had arisen before him in the course of the morning evinced the peculiar and onerous nature of his duties. Having bestowed on each the attention commensurate with the importance of the matter to which it referred, he had now directed his scrutiny to a voluminous document that, written in a round legible hand, appeared to be the elaborately transcribed notes of a case which involved a disclosure of the most remarkable and astounding description.

As he read on, his brow, indented with the deeply-furrowed lines of thought, contracted in profound meditation, and the rapid manner in which he extracted memoranda of names and dates for future assistance to his memory proved that the subject which engrossed his inquiry was of more than customary magnitude.

When his perusal had terminated, he rang a small bell that was at his side, and Mr. Harlowe, his confidential clerk, emerged from an adjoining room in answer to his summons.

"Has the commissioner of police yet arrived?" he inquired.

"Mr. Gowan is waiting in the ante-room, sir, at this moment," was the reply.

"Admit him, and then have the goodness to take your seat at this table," continued the secretary, his glance returning to the papers that he held.

Mr. Gowan, the commissioner of police, who was now ushered in, was a somewhat corpulent individual, rather advanced in years, and exhibiting the habitual peculiarities of his position in a certain air of austere authority that was visible in his manner. He was dressed in a neat and unostentatious style, and quietly took up his position in the chair indicated for his reception. The clerk, ranging the writing materials before him, in readiness to note down the instructions he might receive, likewise stationed himself on the opposite side.

"I am fully of opinion," began the home-secretary, addressing himself to the commissioner, "that the subject to which you have called my attention is one requiring the most complete and vigilant investigation. Without attaching undue importance to the particulars with which I have been furnished, it is yet evident to me that a dangerous and deeply-organised conspiracy exists which has for its object the subversion of order and the destruction of the rights of property. That this daring combination must be instantly and effectually crushed is of course the determination of the crown, and I am not displeased to find that to one so competent and experienced the principal share of this business has been already delegated."

Mr. Gowan slightly bowed.

"Of the means hitherto adopted for this purpose," resumed the secretary, "I approve most unreservedly. Your plan of preserving in secret the defensive arrangements that you intend to employ merits my warmest approbation; and I concur with your views also of allowing the plot to proceed until it is upon the eve of execution. By so acting, we shall unquestionably obtain a firm hold of the principal instigators, and acquire evidence of the most important kind. It must not be forgotten, however, in the meantime, that a strict watch must be kept over the parties implicated; and as, from the names and description of those I find figuring in the record before me, they appear exclusively confined to persons in well-known and humble circumstances of life, I apprehend that such a surveillance will not be difficult."

"I have already ensured this, and given out the necessary instructions for the purpose," observed the commissioner.

"But there is one circumstance," continued the home-secretary, "that I cannot clearly comprehend, and this appears to me to involve a mystery which it is highly essential we should instantly unravel. When I read in this summary of intelligence that has been acquired, the statement that six thousand guns, pistols, and other offensive weapons, have been known to be secreted in different parts of the metropolis, and that no less than twelve thousand pikes and spear-

heads have been privately purchased, and distributed among the various operatives who are expected to take a part in this foolish insurrection, I am utterly at a loss to guess at the source from which the funds for this expenditure have been derived. Have you any reason to suppose that persons of wealth or rank have furnished the finances?"

"It is to that portion of the investigation that my attention has been of late principally directed," replied Mr Gowan, "and every day has confirmed the suspicion I entertained, that the quantity of forged Bank of England notes and spurious coinage, so extensively forced into circulation during the last month, will be found the chief source of the outlay. So well made as almost to defy detection, without being subjected to the experienced eye of those accustomed to such forgeries, these notes have been uttered in every part of England, as well as extensively disseminated on the continent, and by some new process by which they are manufactured the difficulty of distinguishing the false from the true is considerably increased."

"And have the authorities at the Bank no clue to this hidden machinery—no plan to suggest that would lead to its detection?"

"Not the slightest; they are completely paralysed by the ingenuity and skill with which the forgery is effected. Every week fresh evidence is afforded them of the extent to which the practice is carried on, and, from the uniform dexterity with which the imitation is executed, it is their firm conviction that in one man and one place alone this gigantic system is concentrated."

"You are, indeed, throwing a new light upon this matter," said the secretary, after some reflection; "but what do you propose?"

"After a long consultation with the chief cashier yesterday, it was agreed upon that to issue handbills denouncing the fraud, and cautioning the public against the notes in circulation, would only alarm the commercial world, without leading to a suppression of the crime. It was, besides, considered necessary, as in the other affair under consideration—and more especially when its connection with it was understood—to preserve an apparent ignorance and apathy that would throw the others off their guard, and make them more confident of that cunning contrivance by which they have hitherto baffled our attempts to reach the first promoters of the scheme. My agents

are therefore now silently at work, and no general intimation will be given until we are upon the track of the principal offender."

"I have every reason to approve of your sagacity, Mr. Gowan; and this is not the first time we have been compelled to have recourse to you in pursuing these measures. To you, therefore, I shall still entrust the task of thwarting and exterminating the aims and instruments of this atrocious confederation; but, tell me, has the code of private signals I suggested yet been adopted for your telegraphic communications?"

"It was last night, sir, tried for the first time, and found to answer the purpose admirably," rejoined the commissioner. "Here is the message sent to me by the Liverpool superintendent of police in answer to my inquiry; and as the key to the cipher is only known to ourselves, we have the satisfaction of knowing that it is morally impossible any person can guess at the nature of the information transmitted."

With this, a slip of paper, having written upon it the eleven numerical and alphabetical characters mentioned in the first chapter, was withdrawn from a black morocco pocket-book, and handed to the secretary for his inspection.

"Take the middle number, which is 5, for the key, and translate it, Harlowe," said the secretary, handing it over to the clerk, after a cursory glance, and awaiting the result of his elucidation.

The official rose from his seat, and, unlocking with a small patent key the private drawer of a substantial bureau opposite, he took out a large sheet of parchment from the case in which it was enfolded, and spread it open on the baize. It was a mere transcript of the letters of the alphabet, ranged with Arabic numerals in parallel lines; but, though apparently a document of simple and intelligible construction, the plan devised by its means was a mode of secret communication, so intricate and incomprehensible to the uninitiated, that it might have safely defied the closest investigation to discover the principle on which it was formed.

"Words or letters?" asked the clerk, hesitating and looking towards the commissioner.

"Words," said the functionary of police; and the clerk, then fitting from another case a corresponding index to the letters, was enabled by that process to arrive at the following signification of the symbols:—

"*3rd class.—Tall man—dark complexion—black whiskers—unknown—suspicious—watch!*"

The facility with which this could be read off, from letters apparently having no connection with each other, may be thus explained:

The characteristics of height, form, and complexion were noted down in successive columns, answering to certain alphabetical signs; the adjectives, indicative of his being either familiar to the provincial police or amenable to their suspicions, had corresponding numerals, and the figure placed in the middle of the sentence formed the clue by which the descriptive index, as it might be called, was fixed to the adjoining cipher. Thus the symbols were susceptible of innumerable combinations, and as the sender and receiver each possessed the medium of carrying on this private code of correspondence, it could be easily varied at pleasure without others deciphering the means employed.

"Such was the exact manner in which I interpreted it last night," said the commissioner approvingly, as he heard the exposition given; "I had written for the description of a person who I understood would arrive in the train that reaches town by nine P.M., having furnished special information for the purpose that I had gathered from my own agents. The superintendent was accordingly at the Liverpool station in readiness, marking each passenger as he went through the office, and the only one to whom the letter applied was the one he referred to in this message."

"And were your suspicions that this man was leagued with the persons of whom we are in search, found to be correct?" inquired the secretary.

"So far as circumstances enable me to decide, I have reason to believe that at last we are on the right track," pursued the other. "He was traced to a low and obscure public-house in Westminster, where he passed the night; and I have since heard that he has been seen in company with a fellow named Saunders, long suspected of being concerned in coining. Their movements are both, however, carefully watched by the detectives in private clothes, and I have no doubt that in a few days I shall be in possession of some details worth knowing."

"And the man called 'the Firebrand,' whose inflammatory speeches seem to have produced some dangerous symptoms among the poor and ignorant classes, whose passions he has roused,—is he being still subjected to your vigilance?"

"He is. Yesterday he was heard haranguing a mob in Bethnal Green, and, as usual, inciting the populace to take up arms against the government. Living on the subscriptions of the poor hard-working people, whom he so cruelly deludes by his pretended interest in their welfare, you may rely upon it he will not cease to pursue his career until we arrest him for sedition."

"I can plainly see," observed the secretary, "that these men are working upon the multitude with a view to promote their own infamous plans of robbery. With nothing to lose, they hope, by the terror which their revolutionary attack would inspire, to profit by the result of even one hour's tumult. The idea of bringing together an assemblage of one hundred thousand armed rebels on Kennington Common is a chimera undeserving of serious attention; and they who have asserted its possibility know it to be false. But still, as such designs, wild and absurd as they are, must be efficiently checked, I am glad to find the measures you have taken for the purpose are so admirably calculated to preserve inviolate the majesty of the law."

"I am to understand, then, that you will leave to me the further management of this affair," said the commissioner, bowing his consciousness of the implied compliment.

"Certainly," responded the representative of the crown, "and of course I will take care in certain quarters to defend the legality of any further precautions you may think it necessary to adopt—such as employing spies who may make themselves conspicuous among them by exhortations to violence, and far exceed in their rebellious denunciations the most furious of the mob-orators themselves."

"Such an arrangement will be duly considered by me," returned the functionary, now rising to depart, "and indeed it formed a portion of my intentions; to-morrow, information of what further events may have transpired in the interim shall be forwarded as usual."

After some further business had been discussed, unnecessary now to detail, the commissioner retired, the clerk replaced in the bureau the papers he had brought forth, with the additional documents that had that morning been furnished, and the Home Secre-

tary, finding that his presence was demanded elsewhere, took his departure to engage in a consultation with the members of the cabinet.

Abont the same time that this interview took place, the carriage of the Earl of Winterton was conveying its noble owner to the mansion of Lady Adeline Temple, in Portman Square. To avoid interrupting the progress of events, it will be better, perhaps, to anticipate his arrival by furnishing in this place some preliminary particulars of the peeress and her position.

This fair patrician, with whom the earl sought a tender alliance, was the last remainlng member of a noble family connected with the Irish peerage, and her arrival in London, where she had "come out" as the belle of the season a few years before, had been the signal for a crowd of eager worshippers to throw themselves at her feet as the first offering of that mighty metropolis to which she had come prepared for a long career of conquest, and tanght from her acknowledged beauty to expect the homage of submissive snitors.

Deprived of both her parents at an early age, and jnst returned from a continental tour of some duration, under the protective escort of her aunt, the Dowager-Countess of Walsingham, Adeline had been ushered into the world of fashion a complete stranger; and the excitement which her *débût* occasioned was not so much owing to the introduction of her relative the countess, who officiated as her *chaperone*, as to the attention aud admiration which her personal qualifications commanded. From the circumstances to which reference has jnst been made, her character and disposition were materially influenced; and from the same cause a generous spirit might have palliated their defects, even whilst they were jnstifiably condemned. Never knowing the kindly correction of a father—never feeling the loving tenderness of a mother—Adeline had been exclnsively educated under the supervision of her father's sister, a woman whose mind, narrowed by the most nnscrnpulous selfishness, and tainted with the most baneful prejudices, was little calcnlated to impart correct principles of action, and foster those genial sympathies in another which she was nnable herself te apprehend or appreciate.

Alternately chided and petted in her yonth, now scolded without a cause, and anon praised without a reason, the girl had gained maturity without abandoning the thoughts and habits of the child. Capricious in her desires, weak and vacillating in her decisions—at one time foolishly headstrong, and at another yielding, almost without knowing why, to the sngestions of her advisers—it was difficult to arrive at a full comprehension of her character. She was vain, because admiration pleased her; and the fulsome adulation that her charms provoked she regarded rather as a right than as a mere courtesy; bnt she was yet not proud, for the distinction of rank never influenced her in the choice of her acquaintances. The comparatively small income she derived from her inheritance relieved her to some extent from the persecution of mere fortnne-hunters; but the same sonrce of immunity on the one hand was the cause of innnmerable annoyances on another, for the Dowager Countess of Walsingham, anxious to secure a wealthy alliance for her nlece, had not failed to so govern her introduction to society as to expose her to the endless persecution of those who had the requisite wealth to add lustre to a coronet.

At last, what was considered likely to prove an eligible match was found. Taking advantage of some complimentary attentions paid by the Earl of Winterton one evening at a *soirée* given at her own residence the dowager impressed npon Adeline the advantages to be derived from encouraging his addresses; and, acceding with passive indifference to the wishes of her relative, she had listened to the formal protestations of the earl without passion, as she had received his previons advances without pleasure.

This business-like love-match had so far proceeded as to give rise to those anticipative paragraphs in the fashionable prints where the public were informed that "an alliance was on the *tapis* between the noble and distinguished Earl of —— and the beantiful and accomplished Lady T——;" and in the circles of the *bon-ton* the expected event had been long critically discussed and commented npon. All that was now wantieg, therefore, to maintain the interest that had been excited, was for the day to be named on which the earl would accompany his affianced bride to the altar.

Having thus allnded to the position in which they were naturally placed, let us now follow the earl to the residence of her whose only gratification from the proposed nnion was that linked with the assumption of a higher title.

Yonng, for she had hardly seen her three-and-twentieth summer, and endowed with all the accomplishments snitable to her station, the Lady Adeline was indeed superlatively beantiful; bnt it was the beauty of the statne or the picture; it wanted *soul* to make the loveliness complete. The glance of her bright dark eye—no paradox, though it sonnds like one—would have sent a thrill through the heart of the most cold and unimpassioned; but it would make conquests, not captives. One day you wonld be spell-bound by its influence, and the next the impression would be forgotten. The classically formed outline of the featnres, with the complexion exquisitely transparent, and the delicate roseate tints of the cheek softening down to the white and spotless pnrity of the neck beneath, extorted admiration from the beholder, bnt exhibited little of that play of expression which, to the plainest face, gives interest, and to the mere bewitching half their natnral charm. It was like a landscape in which the eye of the spectator finds an enchanting combination of objects to delight his vision, but misses the ray of sunlight that would animate and vivify the whole. Her figure was rather slender, but symmetrical, and of that pleasing medium stature that most advantageously sets off the contonr of the female form. Such was the youthful betrothed of the earl, who had already been regarded by her more with the feeling of respect due to a father than with the warm glow of affection given to a lover who was so soon to enjoy a nearer and dearer claim.

Finding that Adeline was alone, the Earl of Winterton dispensed with the officious ceremony of the domestic, and ascended to the drawing-room, where, warned of his arrival by the sound of the carriage, she was waiting expectantly to receive him.

"Did you peruse my note this morning?" asked the earl, as soon as the customary salutations had been exchanged. "I only returned from the hall last evening, or I should have been earlier in paying my visit; as it was, I was natnrally anxious to apprise you of my arrival as soon as possible."

"The consideration evinced by yonr lordship has, I assure you, been fully appreciated," replied Adeline; "but I am confident yon will excuse my referring further to so delicate a point until I have consnlted the Countess of Walsingham npon the subject."

"Let me, however, be convinced that my dear Adeline has no scruples in giving her assent to a day so near at hand," pursued the peer, gazing tenderly on the fair form before him. "Have I been too precipitate in fixing the period of our nuptials—too eager to avail myself of the happiness in store?" and with the permitted privilege of an accepted lover, he enclosed her waist affectionately as he spoke.

"That which is agreeable to your lordship," responded Lady Temple, slightly blushing and casting her eyes coquettishly to the ground, "cannot prove otherwise to myself, particularly as—as—" and she paused in confusion, hesitating to proceed.

"As the Countess Walsingham, your respected relative, and myself have already been so considerate as to arrange the preliminaries? Am I not right in supposing that was to be your reply?"

Adeline playfully signified the earl had correctly interpreted her meaning.

"Then on Thursday week, at St. George's, Hanover Square," continued the earl, "I shall have reason to proclaim myself the happiest of men. And now, Adeline, having thus far assured myself of the period when my life of celibacy will expire, may I beg the favour of a little serious conversation with you?"

"*Serious* conversation!" echoed his surprised auditor, uplifting her eyes towards his, and looking at him with strange interest and perplexity; "what can possibly have induced your lordship to think of such a thing?"

"Yes, that which I am about to say is far different to the ordinary language of a lover, and therefore I preface it with that phrase to engage your more earnest attention. But I must beg of you to discard in the first place this formal mode of addressing me; call me Arthur—it will please me better, and is more consonant to the position in which we stand."

"I will do so for the future; but I was afraid, Arthur, that you might have thought me too familiar, too boldly presuming in discourse to anticipate my future privileges. I shall henceforth be less scrupulous; but you were about to communicate something to me of importance, and the increased gravity of your manner only heightens my anxiety to hear it."

"It *is* of importance," emphasised the earl, his features becoming more earnest and sombre in their expression; "but let us be seated, and I would again solicit your attention to my words."

Placing a chair for Adeline in the recess of the old bow-window overlooking the square, and occupying himself a place by her side, the earl took her hand impressively within his own, and thus began:

"We are about shortly to be united, and before that irrevocable vow is made that death alone can sever, I should wish you, Adeline, to calmly and dispassionately reflect on the change that is upon the eve of taking place."

He paused for an instant, as if suppressing some strong emotion that rose within his breast, and then continued in the same calm and sententious strain as before:

"The difference in our ages will naturally produce a corresponding variance in our inclinations. I am partial to a retirement which to you would seem irksome, and averse, therefore, to withdraw you from those scenes of gaiety and splendour of which you are born to be the ornament; I am desirous that you should still mingle in society, even though I should not be the companion of your pleasures. You will find me kind, affectionate, and indulgent—unwilling to deprive you of any enjoyment that may tend to promote your happiness; but in return I shall expect from you love, gratitude, and obedience."

"My heart now acknowledges the two first," murmured Adeline; "and the last becomes indeed my duty."

"I shall be no tyrant in my commands," resumed the earl, a faint smile appearing on his noble and manly countenance; "but should I find the exuberance of youth require that gentle training which my experience of the world enables me to give, I shall expect that you will yield in deference to a judgment that comes at least accredited by age."

Adeline, in whose heart that final sentence had caused a painful chord to vibrate, was about to venture on a reply; but the words died away upon her lips, and she remained silent.

"My demeanour towards you, I am aware, has exhibited little of that enthusiastic temperament which is presumed to indicate the ardour of an attachment. At my time of life we speak of matters of this nature with reflections guided by reason, rather than impelled by the whirlwind of passion. It is to bring before you these anticipations of the life that you are about to lead that I have therefore sought this present interview. Is the picture that I have drawn displeasing?"

"Oh! my lord, a thousand actions have testified your kindness and devotion towards me; I should be indeed unworthy of your esteem, had not admiration for your noble, generous character been awakened in return; and to now doubt the sincerity of your words, to deny that the existence you have taught me to expect is that which will prove most agreeable to my wishes, I feel would be to acknowledge myself incapable of meriting your regard. You are the master of my heart and hand, and I desire no other."

"This assurance, Adeline," exclaimed the earl, as he raised her hand to his lips, "has removed a doubt that has sometimes pressed heavily upon my mind. Yes, a doubt of the true basis on which your attachment to me has been founded. Pardon me if I am becoming tedious in my candour, but between us there should be no reservations—nothing that we can afterwards look back upon with regret. I have thought, in one of those gloomy moods when we are disposed to view the darker phases of our life, that the persuasions of the countess might have biased your decision—that you might have wished yourself unfettered, and that perhaps you had already sighed in secret for a more congenial partner. To hear, however, from your own lips, the frank avowal that I am the sole possessor of your heart, is a rapture that I hardly dared to hope."

"Then did you really imagine, Arthur, that I could find a worthier lover in the tribe of butterfly suitors that fluttered round me when I trespassed on their dominions? Oh! how little do you know their hollow worthlessness! how deeply do you wrong yourself! Rigidly excluded from the world, brought up in strict accordance with my aunt's ideas of proper maidenly reserve, I was liable, I confess, to be carried away by that vortex into which I was so suddenly plunged. Vain of the admiration I excited, the fascination of a myriad temptations might have still further enthralled me in the gulf to which I was hastening; but you, like a kind and gentle guardian, came to snatch me from its dangerous depths. You taught me the real value of that tinsel homage of which I had been so proud; you it was who first enabled me to distinguish the difference between the false and the true; and can it be wondered that, with so excellent a monitor willing to instruct me, I found acquaintance ripen into

friendship, and friendship change insensibly to love?"

Adeline spoke this warmly, for she felt its truth; and being, besides, as yet a stranger to the more raptnrous emotions of the human heart, she had been unconsciously mistaking the attachment she felt towards the earl for a feeling of a more violent and impetnous description. As we have already hinted, the chief object of her ambition was that which the Countess of Walsingham had first warmed into being—the vanity of espousing a nobleman of more exalted rank, and the corresponding influence which her elevation would enable her to possess. She really entertained a profound regard for the earl, and sincerely believed happiness would result from the union; but little did she imagine the terrible consequences of a compact which was destined to wreak such eventful retribution. And unhappily these forced matches are of too frequent recurrence in society. Interest, convenience, the desire of perpetnating a title, are each and all the impulses that spur the aristocracy to form alliances of this kind; and the marriage that is celebrated with all the pomp and ceremony of a holy rite is thus desecrated by an association with the most worldly and debased sentiments of our nature. It is one that the heart seldom sanctions, and that love never hallows.

To do the earl justice, he wonld, at the very last moment, have foregone his claim rather than have led an unwilling bride to the altar; but Adeline, as she had deceived herself, deceived him. From the tenor of the foregoing conversation, which had led to an assnrance that had given the nobleman unfeigned satisfaction, it will be seen that the fine noble qnalities of the peer had not failed to prodnce a corresponding impression on her mind; it seemed as if her thoughts had gathered strength and firmness since the intimacy that had sprung up between them, bnt the wayward fancies that had characterised her early life were yet as powerfnl as ever. The consciousness of a necessity for concealing the weaker points of her character had given a stronger tone to her discourse but at heart Adeline was still the same nncertain, capricious being as of yore. There was a dangerous ignorance of the trne natnre of the attachment snbsisting between her and the earl, of which she was soon to learn the stern and bitter experience.

That night the Earl of Winterton appeared in his box at the opera, with the future countess hanging upon his arm, and exhibiting a grace and loveliness that, even in that brilliant assemblage of the graceful and beantiful, scarcely found a parallel. Amidst the hum of fashionable small-talk, the constant buzz of patrician voices criticising the appearance and costnme of the visitors, and the general scrutiny of *lorgnettes* that, at the close of each act, was a distinguished feature of the amnsement, the Earl and his intended absorbed a considerable portion of the public attention. The gentle whisper, and the furtive gaze so frequently directed towards the box, evinced the interest which their presence had excited; and, with a show of pardonable pride, the nobleman did not baffle the obvious design of the observers by withdrawing to a less conspicnous position. He saw that the charms of Adeline were the theme of universal admiration, and he conld not repress a natnral feeling of exultation, as he thought, "My home will henceforth be the shrine of that beanty which is now bowing down all hearts to its worship."

The curtain having fallen on the last act of the opera, the earl would have left; but Adeline, herself viewing with silent gratification the triumph of her position, and anxious to prolong it, prevailed upon him to stay and witness the performance of the new ballet that followed, and which was regarded with some impatient interest, since it was to be the medium of an introdnction to the English stage of a new danseuse from Italy, whose celebrity had long preceded her arrival.

The opening of the ballet, introducing, amidst a bright Italian landscape, gronps of peasants in pictnresque dresses, celebrating a festival among the mountains, immediately engaged the attention of the earl; for it struck at once upon a familiar chord, and revived associations of his early life, when he, some twenty years before, had visited that snnny clime. But when, heralded by lond and protracted acclamations, the débutante herself appeared, and the earl saw in those fascinating features a startling likeness to the Gianella whom he had so long mourned, and whose image seemed here restored to him, he could scarcely believe that he was gazing on reality. It appeared to him as thongh a dream was mocking him with the retrospection of the buried past, and he sat entranced and motionless, lest a movement or a breath should destroy the vividness of the illusion. At last the *divertissement*, in which the new figurante had sustained the principal part, drew to a close; the audience, excited to enthusiasm by her wondrons bounds, her grace of gesture, and suppleness of limb, drowned the lively and inspiriting accompaniment of the orchestra in a burst of rapturous applanse; and when the final tablean was formed, in which she assumed a posture of surpassing elegance, and embodied in herself the realisation of the sculptor's art, the plaudits rang upon the air, bonquets were cast in floral showers at her feet, and the success of the danseuse was genuine and complete. Adeline herself, fascinated by the wonderful skill and expression of the beantifnl opera-dancer, had repeatedly testified her delight to the earl; but it was not until the curtain had fallen, and the spectators, justifying with verbal panegyrics the *furor* of her reception, were quitting their seats, that she peceived the earl had been unconscious of her praises, and was still gazing on the blank void, as if waiting for the scene to again appear before him.

A word recalled him to himself. Starting like a man snddenly roused from the beatitude of a delicions vision, the earl rose, and stammered forth an apology for his temporary abstraction, which he attribnted to the influence that music habitnally exercised over his mind. Satisfied with the explanation given, and having no reason to trace its origin to a deeper source, Adeline rallied the earl on his want of gallantry, and was playfully exacting a promise from him that he would be less oblivious for the future, when, as they mingled in the throng, returning throngh the box-lobby, she noticed the face of her companion become deadly pale, and then, reddening with snbdned passion, express a look of ineffable scorn. Anxious to ascertain the canse, she turned her head in the direction indicated by the earl's glance, and saw gazing upon her, with a rude stare, a dashingly-attired individual, whom she remembered dnring the ballet as having before attracted her notice by his obtrusive familiarities. The box he had occupied was one upon the same tier, in a position that gave him the opportnnity of looking direct across to that belonging to the earl, and the natural inference was, therefore, that he had pnrposely crossed their path on his way ont. As soon as the crowd had slightly dispersed, the Earl of Win-

terton, without referring to the person thus subjected to his indignant reproof, drew the arm of Adeline closer within his own, and hurried her through the intervening passage towards the outer portico. He assisted Adeline to the carriage, and was himself about to follow, when the same person who had before excited his anger placed a hand detainingly upon his shoulder, and rapidly exclaimed:

"One word, my lord—is this war of deadly enmity between us to be pursued remorseless to the grave?"

"Ay, villain! and beyond, if it be possible!" hissed the earl through his clenched teeth, as he confronted the speaker, and losing all command of himself in the rage that attended this new interruption, he sprang into his seat without waiting for further parley, and drawing up the windows of the carriage with a furious jerk, ordered the coachman to drive on instantly to Portman Square.

"Then, my relentless persecutor, may the curse rest with thee!" cried the other, adding half-audibly as he mixed again in the crowd, "I see the game that is to be played, and the stake, though hazardous, shall be a bold one."

The man who had thus threatened, and who is already known to the reader under the name of "Fitzroy Greene," then made his way moodily into the Haymarket, and plunging into one of the glaring gas-lit avennes that belong to the wine and supper-rooms of that locality, recklessly surrendered himself to the orgies of the place.

CHAPTER VII.

LONDON UNDERGROUND.

THERE is a sudden, remarkable transition, in passing from one side of the Thames to its opposite, that no one who has ever traversed the metropolitan bridges can fail to have noticed. The river presents, on each shore, a contrast as strongly marked as it is peculiar in its nature.

Picture the cheerful thoroughfare of the Strand, with its busy throng of promenaders—the opulent display of its warehouses, the signs of restless activity that, night and day, are visible along its course; for even when the moil and turmoil of daily traffic has ceased, and the shops are closed, you shall look up to the lamp-lit rooms above, and see the workers of the night ceaselessly taking up the chain of toil, and pausing not till morning calls the waking artisan to labour. You shall see where, through the long hours of slumber, when the seal of sleep is resting on the aching eyelids of the exhausted multitude, courting the refreshing influence of "tired nature's sweet" repose, the wakeful tribe who keep watch and ward over the mind of man are still intent upon their vigils. And to mark those shadows flung upon the slanting frame—to learn that those gaunt forms, bending over the screened light of the hot gas, are the compositors of the morning and weekly journals—the men who chronicle the history of the world day by day, and with whom the click of the type, as it passes through their fingers, must sound like the reverberation of distinct voices breathing the records of human life—to see and feel all this, is to have presented to our view the very soul of civilisation itself, assuming its most impressive and palpable embodiment. They are the true alchemists of the moderns—transmuting, by the midnight lamp, those slender sections of the duller metal into that which shall gleam bright gold upon the morrow. Oh! wondrous art! Glory to the craft of Caxton! honour to the manes of Guttenberg!

But leaving this mighty artery of the great heart of London, and crossing with a sudden turn the noble bridge of Waterloo, how instantaneously the scene changes! It is as if we were borne to a totally different quarter, which had little, or nothing, in common with the place we had just quitted. There is a strange, vagabondish aspect about the locality, unlike every thing seen elsewhere, and which always seems the essential characteristic of the Surrey side of the water. Folks who would hesitate at breaking through the etiquette of the road on the opposite banks, here suffer no such prejudices to trammel their progress. The man who would hesitate to brave public opinion by smoking a cigar in early day through the streets of Middlesex, has only to inhale the transpontine atmosphere, and his scruples vanish. The people you encounter are such as you meet nowhere else. There is a free-and-easy, half-slang, half-stylish air about them, that seems to stamp the character of the neighbourhood; and the houses are oddly shuffled up together, mixing dwellings of external respectability with questionable buildings that appear to have half a century of doubtful reputation to answer for.

Towards evening the aspect of the road is changed, but the darkness, instead of hiding its flaws and blemishes, serves only to reveal them in a stronger light. It is then that you see the cigar-shop, with its scanty stock, and a flimsy veil of red drapery, telling the eye more than it conceals, filled with the idlers of the hour, the second-hand men about town, who generally turn out to be mere men about nothing. The Jewish-looking woman behind the counter, decked in tawdry finery, the genteel foppery of the lounger, the glance at the back parlour, partly exposed by the half-open door, and where, nine times out of ten, you shall see a fellow with a thickly-whiskered face and gaudy waistcoat, heavily hung with mosaic jewellery, lolling upon a dusty sofa, must all suggest another source of profit than the trade of the tobacconist so conveniently assumed.

Then follow houses that have undergone, in half-a-dozen different periods of the year, as many various mutations; the shops belonging to them changing their contents with the rapidity of landscapes exhibited in the dissolving-views, and each appearing before their final transformation equally as vague and indistinct. They make no figure in the "Post-office Directory;" for before the name and avocation of the occupant could be entered, a fresh change takes place, and the last tenant glides mysteriously away to make room for his successor. These have all a rusty, insolvent look about them; and it is a curious speculation, as you pass and see again those shabby shutters, with the announcement of "to let" chalked boldly on the blistered paint, to conjure up the different trades that have been despairingly carried on in the same place before, and wonder what kind of goods will at last appear behind them.

It is to one of the tenements of this kind that we are now about to direct the reader's attention.

More solemn, more shabby in appearance than the houses round it, the one to which we refer had an aspect positively gloomy and sepulchral; flanked, as it was, by two inhabited dwellings, the dreary loneliness of its deserted rooms, the dusty film that encrusted the window-sills and panes of glass, most of them cracked and broken, and the blank look of the shop-front protruding coldly into the thoroughfare, gave a shuddering chill to the pedestrian as he passed

by, that might have been produced by the sight of a corpse standing boldly erect amid the living, and mocking vitality with its glazed and stony stare.

A murder, nnder circumstances of more than usual atrocity, had taken place there, about ten years before, and the perpetrator of the horrible deed had never been discovered. The nnmbers on the door had been changed to conceal the identity of the house and obliterate the recollection of the crime that had been committed, but a visible curse seemed to hang about its walls, and though sncccssive occupiers had tried their fortunes for a time, no trade appeared to flourish under its roof.

Such was its condition when, about three months before the date of our narrative, the house, that had been to let for nearly a year, found a new tenant, who, without stipnlating, like the rest, for an abatement of rent, at once boldly became the renter of the proscribed dwelling. The first quarter had passed, the landlord had received his dues, the rate-collector had been paid on his first application, and though the meagre furniture of the npper rooms, seen from the road when the long blinds were partially drawn aside, gave but little promise of comfort in the interior, the demands made npon the new honseholder were fully satisfied, and the landlord was content.

But thongh the house had been thus occnpied for some time, the shutters had never been removed, and the neighbonrs, who had heard, with curious interest, the report of a new tenant having entered upon its possession, exhausted their patience in speculating npon the nature of the probable rivalry they wonld have to encounter. The only known inhabitant was a man seen to emerge from the doorway abont dusk, and who rarely returned before midnight, when he let himself stealthily in with the key; and soon afterwards a light might be seen flickering about the kitchen, the place where he was presnmed to sleep. Beyond the periodical visit of the tax-collector, no person was ever seen to call, and at last the rumour went, that the tradesman who had taken the house had since abandoned his intention of residing there, and that the inmate was only one who had been permitted to sleep npon the premises until a new customer was found.

It was abont one in the morning, when a cab, containing a solitary passenger, rattled over the bridge from the Strand into the Waterloo Road, and deposited its fare at the corner of Stamford Street.

The passenger who alighted, and who was the same personage that has been hitherto called the Phantom, dismissed the driver with an extra gratuity for the speed at which he had been conveyed, and watching the departnre of the vehicle towards the nearest stand, he waited till a few straggling parties had gone by, and then pnrsued his way to the house which we have been just describing.

Carefnlly turning the key in the lock, so as to make as little noise as possible, he opened the door, and passing unobserved into the dark and narrow passage beyond, re-closed it behind him, so gently that the sonnd could excite no attention. Igniting, by means of a Incifer-match, the candle that was placed on a recess, in readiness, he passed on to the extremity of the staircase, and then descended into the kitchen beneath.

The ntter absence of every thing usually associated with the furniture of snch places testified that no person was living in that tenement, and that the customary uses to which it was devoted had long since been abandoned.

For instead of the brightly-polished utensils hung npon the walls, the ruddy blaze of the cheerful fire, the well-swept hearth, the lively ticking of the clock, and the neatly-arranged dresser, with its rows of shining plates and dishes, there was a miserable void, cold, cheerless, and naked.

The walls were bare, stained with neglect and damp, and the boards were thickly grimed with dirt. Not even a chair or table was to be seen about the place; and the spiders, that had woven webs across the shutters, still kept fastened, showed that daylight had only found its way into the room through the cracks and fissnres of the rotten wood-work. The old range, battered and broken, was half-corroded with rust; and the few shelves, the crumbling fixtures that remained, were hanging from drooping nails, that afforded them but a frail support.

With the recollection of the horrible deed of guilt that had been consummated within that dreary habitation, the wretched aspect of the room seemed fearfnlly increased. The involuntary ideas that arose of that being the possible scene of the crime,—that down those stairs the bleeding victim was dragged,—that in those boards the ineffaceable trace of human blood might be found, multiplied the dismal associations of the place fourfold, and made up a picture of shnddering horror agonising to contemplate.

But such thonghts as these passed not through the mind of the sole penetrator into the mysteries of that deserted dwelling. Too intent upon the business that had brought him to the spot to heed the fancies that would have struck a visitor less engrossed by his own designs, the man called "The Phantom" cast the light round the apartment to see that it had been left undisturbed since his last visit, and then, satisfied with his survey, prepared to undertake the mission that had impelled his present one.

Removing the cloak that had hitherto shrouded his gaunt figure, and taking a lantern from the cnpboard that filled up one of the recesses by the fireplace, his next proceeding was to see that his actions were carefully concealed from the gaze of the passengers without; and, finding the barrier across the window still impenetrable, he commenced his labours for the night.

At the front of the kitchen, and so situated that the excavation had been made for some distance beneath the pavement, was a capacious cellar, that it scarcely needed the gritty refuse strewed about the ground to reveal had been in former days used for the reception of coals. It was an arched vault, substantially constructed of brick; but instead of the same materials, the flooring was laid down with deal planks, as if the level of the basement story had been continued originally to a considerable space beyond.

To these boards the first movement of the personage so strangely designated was directed.

Casting the rays from his lantern upon the ground, until they fell upon a plank broader than the rest, he stooped down, and with a small chisel that he had brought with him for the purpose from an adjoining shelf, gently raised it from its position. As soon as the plank was thus elevated, the light disclosed a ladder, placed exactly against the aperture; and descending this medium of communication with the cell below, the "Phantom" found himself at last in the midst of a spacious area, that, in marked contrast with the unfurnished region he had just quitted, was completely adapted for the object to which it had been appropriated.

He was now about twenty eet beneath the level of the roadway.

The place in which he stood was a snbterranean gallery of vast dimensions, utterly unknown to the thousands that daily passed above it, and constantly in danger of being discovered, when any alteration or repairs of the sewerage rendered necessary a descent of the men into the mighty world of London underground. Yet thongh the pickaxe and the spade had freqnently tonched npon its boundary, the region of these extraordinary cavities had never been penetrated; and whilst for thirty years hundreds of labourers had dug and delved within a few paces of this gigantic labyrinth, none had ever dreamed of its existence.

The old inhabitants of the metropolis need scarcely to be told that this now dense and widely spreading district was once a marsh;—within the recollection of those living, a flat, swampy level, scarcely raised above the surface of the Thames.

When the approaches to the bridge were made, an artificial elevation was given to the road, and upon the great platform thus raised was built the line of houses that have since formed its margin. At the commencement of this elaborate undertaking, even a street is spanned by a tremendous viadnct, and a tavern beneath has beceme dnplicated by another tavern which forms the superstructure of the lower.

As we proceed sonthward, the roofs and chimneys of the nest of dwellings beneath are observed to be no higher than the basement of the houses in the road, and this snperiority of elevation continues decreasing gradually as we advance, until the road regains its level and the land rises to a general uniformity.

From the open railings let into the pavement in this portion of the road, a passenger may look down into the lofty areas below and see the domestic economy of one of these honseholds being carried on far beneath him, at a depth which makes the eye giddy whilst it gazes, and makes one tremble for the insecurity of that slight grating between the spectator and a chasm, into which, by the fracture of a few thin bars, he wonld be suddenly and helplessly impelled.

We have thus brought clearly and tangibly before us a phase of that vast subterranean communic ation which subsists through the entire length and breadth of this great city. We can realise in this way the mighty machinery that is ever employed ministering to the necessities of its inhabitants. We are reminded, by this glimpse of the hnge pile beneath the pavement, that, if we want water, we have bnt to turn a small instrument, and our vessels are filled as by magic. Do we desire its riddance when no longer serviceable, the trouble is no greater; in an instant it is on its way through the silent depths. "If," as has been before observed, "we wish for an artificial day, through that same mysterious channel comes streaming up into every corner of our chambers, counting-houses, or shops, the subtle air which waits but our bidding to become light." The legends of the Arabian necromancers have no greater marvels than these.

The Waterloo Road, therefore, having been bnilt upon arches, has, from the period of its constrnction to the present time, afforded a remarkable facility for carrying on unlawful and nefarious arts; and this facility has not been neglected by the few who, through accident or design, have become acquainted with its cavernous receases.

Here the trades that do not risk the light of day have been busily and secretly pnrsned with impunity. Far down in these vaulted chasms the private still and the coiner's press have for years existed, and not a sonnd has betrayed their vicinity to the dwellers abeve, for the rattling thunder of the streets stifles all minor noises, and at night the echoes of the workers' steps traversing those winding passages is attribnted to the rats that scamper in hungry hunting-parties throngh the cranks and crevices of this haunt of crime.

Here, in this singular region, unvisited and nnknown to the officers of justice, the damning proofs of many a sanguine murder have been safely deposited; here, sometimes, has even the murdered victim been concealed, hidden in unpenetrated corners till the bones crumbling into dnst have destroyed identity, and the man so strangely disappearing has been thonght to have fled to a distant land, instead of that "from which no traveller returns;" hence, by those avenues known to the initiated, the stealthy bnrglar has stolen forth and perpetrated those astounding thefts that baffle the most acute investigation to account for their commission; and in this vast modern catacomb many of the startling deeds that have struck fear and terror into the neighbourhood have been silently enshrouded and entombed.

From the implements of his craft that were gathered in various directions around him, it was evident that the man called the "Phantom" was a note-forger.

The plan npon which the forgery of a Bank of England note is condncted may be thus explained:—

If a person examines a few Bank of England notes carefully and attentively, he will see that even those which are supposed to be of one kind differ very materially.

If these are held up to a ray of light, slightly moistened, and then magnified with a glass, he will perceive that the lines of the water-marks are not all the same. He will also see that this difference is acci dental, and the result of imperfect manipulation.

By measuring any of the spaces the variation of the water-lines may be easily computed, and the density and thickness of each will be found even more varied in reality than the eye surmised. It is thus seen that the most perfect notes issued by the Bank are imperfect. The three external edges of the notes are rough and uncnt; a circnmstance that favours the forger. The right hand side is cut, and here may be seen the vertical water line, and traced the cut of the counterfoil.

Lastly, the under surface or back of the note is rough, a great advantage to the forger; the upper or printed side is smoothed by pressure, which is also an assistance in perfecting the imitation.

The portion of the gallery in which the Phantom had concentrated the materials of his art was admirably adapted to the pnrpose. From the foot of the ladder which he had descended to reach his subterranean workshop was an open space, extending about thirty feet, and terminated at the end by a lofty arch, the lower section of the span being screened by a wooden barricade reaching nearly to the top.

The sides were formed by the enormons buttresses of arches, stretching away in an opposite direction; and the vault, narrowing as it receded from the great arch, was closed in by a *caisson*, or hollow fabric of timber, that, driven deeply into the earth, and sheathed with massive plates of iron, supported the brickwork above, and continued the mighty chain of masonry on beyond.

The place was thus an extensive chamber, completely enclosed from the remainder of the passages. and in itself a lofty and capacious apartment.

The roof was, however, thickly overgrown with that green slimy vegetation that hangs npon places where the light of day is rigidly excluded, and where the noisome exhalations reeking from the earth, gorged with the decaying masses of human refnse, feed the existence of the fnngi that thrive upon these gloomy walls.

The ground, saturated with the exnding moisture, likewise exhibited the same repulsive appearance; bnt broken wood, coal-slack, and fragments of crumbling stone, had been cast npon the floor, to absorb the chilling and pernicious moisture.

The overflowing of the river at spring tides inundated these vanlts, and the marks of recent incursions of the Thames showed that such inroads were of continual recurrence.

The opening at the summit of the arch served the purposes of ventilation, for a strong cnrrent of cold air was constantly setting in from the remote windings that led to the apertures by the river side. But the air was still laden with unwholesome odours; and the stench of decaying timber, the smell of rotten garbage, and the faint snffocating exhalations that this pent-up labyrinth engendered, prodnced a sensation sickening and repulsive in the extreme.

The Phantom now lit three lamps—two to furnish the extra amount of light he required, and the third (a spirit-lamp) to provide the necessary heat for the manufacture in which he was about to engage.

This was his substitute for a fire, the smoke from which might otherwise have drawn attention to his proceedings.

The other materials he employed, and which were all ranged upon the ground, or on shelves rudely constructed, where they might be ready for service at a moment's notice, consisted of a vapour-box; a battery, nch as is used for electrotyping; a bottle, containing nitrate of silver — another containing iodine; a daguerrotype apparatus; and a phial, in which was a solntion of phosphorus, dissolved in ether. These, with an engraving-press, a few cups, some chafing-dishes, and other chemical adjuncts needless to detail, comprised the machinery of his profession.

A large deal table and a broken chair composed the furniture of his secret laboratory.

The process was now commenced. Let us follow his mode of operation.

Taking a hundred-pound Bank of England note from his pocket-book, he first moistened it with distilled water, and allowed it to expand till it was thoroughly saturated.

As soon as the moisture had slightly evaporated, he then took a fine camel-hair pencil, dipped in the weak solution of nitrate of silver, and washed the note carefully over. Next, placing it smoothly and evenly beneath the glass vapour-box, he poured a small quantity of his prepared phosphorus into a shallow cup, and, holding it over his spirit-lamp, caused it to evaporate by means of gentle heat. The note was then exposed to the action of the phosphoric vapour for a few minutes, and on removal was found beautifully coated over with an infinitesimally thin film of metallic silver. It was now a metallic conductor, and ready to be applied to the battery.

The apparatus he employed had no sooner been brought in contact with the paper thus silvered, than a surface of copper was deposited on both sides the note; a mould which received its exact fac-simile.

As soon as a sufficient deposit of copper had been formed, the operator removed the plates, and gently filing round the edges, took out the note, which had left behind a complete model of itself.

He next took down the daguerrotype vapour-box, in which some iodine had been placed, and exposed the note to the action of the vapour, which immediately attacked the black lines. With a small sheet of copper, silvered in the same manner as those used for taking daguerrotype portraits, he pressed the iodised note smoothly and lightly on its surface, when the black printed lines of the note yielded the iodine to the sensitive plate, and were transferred to it as an iodide, thus presenting a correct transfer of the printing on the bank-note.

With the plate thus iodised and subjected to the action of the battery, there was now engraved in a single instant of time a perfect fac-simile of the note, and with the forged blank paper previously prepared, he had consequently in his power the means of producing by an easy and rapid process an unrestricted amount of spurious paper currency that required the most microscopic investigation to distinguish from the real.

So carefully, indeed, had he arranged his deceptive plans, that not even the most minute points escaped him. Knowing if the water-marks are copied from a Bank of England note whilst dry, detection was rendered more likely—as the lines so sensibly contract in drying, that those in the forged become less than in the genuine document—he had adroitly enlarged the lines, so that when the note dried, the forged water-marks shrunk to an equal density with the original. With this precaution the resemblance was faultless.

And there, in that subterranean chamber, amid those modern marvels of the age, the potent talismans which the magic of science had conjured forth, the figure of the Phantom was seen gliding stealthily to and fro, the sole traverser of those gloomy vaults that were being made, by his nefarious craft, the temple of Plutus.

Three hours had passed away in the prosecution of his illicit task. With a keen and critical glance he had scrutinised each note as it came into his hands a faithful reflex of the genuine, and he had not paused from his toil until he had accumulated sufficient to produce, when exchanged for real currency, a sum of considerable magnitude.

So certain was the process, so completely concealed from observation the place where it was carried on, so exact the imitation, that if the means existed of converting the false paper into genuine gold, the note-forger could have possessed himself at will of gorgeous palaces, and realised an amount of wealth that would seem fabulous from its very immensity.

The Phantom had worked the last plate, and was now on the point of retracing his steps to the house above, when, as the light of the lamp fell upon the wooden barrier that had been raised against the arch, he saw an object that transfixed him with fear and superstitious horror.

For glaring through a small aperture in one of the planks, at the distance of a few feet from the ground, and exactly fitting the opening in the wood-work, was the eye of a human being, fixing itself intently upon him, and following every action with a penetrating glance.

For an instant he stood rooted to the spot, unable to withdraw from the basilisk gaze he encountered, and his frame becoming tremulous with excitement as he remembered that to all he had done there had been an unseen witness. But this effect was but momentary. Satisfied that his vision had not deceived him, his next impulse was to dash forward and tear away the barricade that concealed the man who had been a spy upon his actions. Simultaneously with the thought he sprang towards the arch, and with a sudden jerk hurled away the intercepting planks, that, rotten with the dank atmosphere of the vaults, offered but slight resistance to his great muscular strength.

A cold current of air that immediately put out the lamp streamed upon him as he rushed into the space beyond, but not before its rays had enabled him to obtain a glimpse of a retreating figure that had receded, as he advanced, behind one of the brick pillars. To follow in the same direction and grapple with the fugitive was the work of an instant, for he was too certain of his adversary's movements to prevent an escape; but, contrary to his anticipations, there was scarcely any resistance to his attack, and the intruder suffered himself to be brought, almost without a struggle, into the note-forger's chamber, where the light of the spirit-lamp, still remaining unextinguished upon the table, cast a feeble illumination around.

"So you have dared to become a spy upon me!" exclaimed the Phantom, speaking with savage fury, as he recognised, to his amazement, the person of Slogger, the coiner's assistant. "How came you here? Tell me without a syllable of equivocation, or, now we are alone, I will repay your dastardly attack upon me with an interest that you shall feel in every bone of your body;" and he grasped him violently by the throat.

"Let go your hold," said Slogger, doggedly, quailing before the fierce eye of his assailant; for, though a great hulking fellow to look at, he was but a coward at heart; "let go, and I'll tell yer every thing."

The other relaxed his grasp, but still stood on the defensive.

"Yer needn't have been so hasty about the matter," said the smasher, gradually recovering himself; "I could have given yer the slip just now, had I liked, for I knows my way through all these here arches blindfold; but I hadn't clapped my eye to the hole and seen who it was—meaning, in course, to call out and have a chat with you—afore you thundered down

the timber, and made me start back to save a broken neck!"

"Then you have seen nothing—nothing that I have been doing?" asked the unknown, eagerly, looking full in the face of the other, to observe whether his question elicited the truth.

"Not I," replied the fellow, glancing with a stupid wonderment at the mystifying apparatus scattered about; "yer arn't been tryin' to find the philosophers' stone, I suppose?"

"What made you come here? How did you obtain an entrance to these passages?" asked the Phantom quickly, heedless of the observation.

"Vhy, since you left the old crib, the peelers have been among us. Bill and Gubbins had a squeak for it, but they managed to sheer off without being seen; however, all the traps have been seized; and as matters had got blown there, I vos sent off to the old haunt to see vhether ve might commence our business again in the ancient quarters."

"Then you formerly carried on the same trade in these vaults?" pursued the note-forger, inquiringly.

"Just guessed it," rejoined Slogger, briefly; "but I thought as how you knowed all about it."

"I had received some intelligence of the plans you adopted," answered the other, with a slight hesitation; "but you were about to say that you had come here for the purpose of ascertaining how matters stood. Now, in what manner did you obtain an entrance, for I begin to consider, after all, that you are playing false with me, and if so ——" A significant reference to the pistol the stranger still retained in his possession completed the sentence.

"Vell, if yer don't believe vhot I have said, you may go yourself to the place and be satisfied," responded the coiner. "I arn't got the gift of the gab like you, but I mean all right, notwithstanding."

"Well, proceed with your story," added the forger; "I shall soon find whether you are deceiving me or not;" and with his eye kept suspiciously upon the man, he awaited the remainder of his explanation.

"The only way I know of down here," continued Slogger, "is through the stables at the back of the road, where Bill once kept a cart, and which he rented specially to serve us in time of need. We gave it up years ago, because what with the water that used to come in, and what with the rats that used to come out, there vos no end of mischief done; but it vos always a favorite vorkshop of the governor's, and he didn't care to lose sight of it entirely."

"Well," urged the Phantom, impatiently, "and last night?"

"Last night, as I tell yer, I vos sent down to see if ve go could go on for a bit in the cellars. So, vith a lucifer or two and a lantern, off I started. The place looked jist the same as ever, and not a straw had been touched; but I had no sooner got up vith the trap and down vith the lantern, than whiff came the wind, and out went the light. I couldn't find the way back; so knowing that there was some chance of getting into the right track again when daylight came, I vos strolling about to find a cosy sleeping-berth, vhich, thanks to my old acquaintance vith the vaults, I could have found without much difficulty, vhen, vhot should I see shining through the arches, a long vay off, but your lamp. Off I goes—claps my eye to the crack—sees an old pal hard at work there—and yer knows the rest; so there is a full, true, and werry particklar account of the entire fakement."

"What has hitherto passed between us," said the Phantom, thoughtfully, as if revolving in his mind some idea that had just suggested itself to him, "will hardly induce me to repose confidence in a man that has to be kept in reach of pistol-shot before his companion can feel safe in his presence. Yet if I fancied I could trust you ——"

"Trust me!" repeated the other; "there arn't a cove in the country who vould do so much as Jack Slogger, pervided he got paid for it; and as for the little scrimmage ve lately had together, the best thing is to say nuffin about it. I didn't know my man then, but that took the mist off my eyelids, and made me like him all the better."

"On the condition, then, that I pay you well for your services, you will undertake to faithfully abide by the directions I shall give you," pursued the Phantom, "even though they should be in opposition to the wishes of the gang with which you are connected?"

"Certainly I vill. As for the old 'un, and Jim Gubbins, I don't vont to do 'em a bad turn, but I arn't werry anxious to do 'em a good one either. One on 'em I already owes a grudge to, but I'll find a vay to square that somehow before long."

"The design of Saunders was, if I understood you rightly," continued the unknown, "to renew the occupation of these vaults, and transfer to this place the business he was carrying on in Palmer's Village?"

"Jist so."

"And if you were to tell him the police had been seen about the neighbourhood, and that they had discovered the system carried on in the vault, he would change his determination and inquire no further—would he not?"

"No doubt of it; he vould be satisfied with vhot I told him, and think no more about the matter."

"Then, for a reason that I don't choose now to reveal, it is necessary that you should prevent his taking possession of these premises, and you had better do so in the manner I have indicated. I require for some time the use of these cellars; and to bring some chemical experiments I am making to a satisfactory conclusion, I must have no interruption, no fellows near me to pry and intrude themselves into my private affairs. I must be alone here—do you understand my meaning?"

"You vould have me put the governor on a false scent, I twig," answered the other; "but there's a chap besides him who knows of the crib and the vay to get to it."

"You mean your associate—the man I saw at the den with you?"

"Vhot, Gubbins! Bless yer heart, he's as innocent of it as an unborn babby. No, the one I mean is Jacob Randall, who used to vork a still here, though I arn't seen him lately."

"Randall," repeated the Phantom, musingly, "a bird-fancier, or the keeper of some shop of that kind in Radcliffe Highway?"

"The same. Vhy, yer seems a regular valking dictionary; yer knows every body," responded Slogger, looking up in astonishment.

"It forms a part of my business," said the unknown, sternly, adopting a look and tone that repelled further inquiry. "I can myself prevent his interference with my pursuits; but come," he added, "you must be away from here before it gets broad daylight, and if further time is occupied you will risk observation. To ensure your being true to the service in which you are now engaged, and to prevent any attempt at treachery, I shall narrowly watch your proceedings after you leave here. If you dare to breathe a word concerning

the interview you have had, or the scene you have witnessed, not only will you lose your reward, but you shall find a sure and certain vengeance overtake you."

"Vell, you always did bother me," observed Slogger, with an assumed carelessness, as he moved towards the broken gap under the arch; "but, curse me, if I know vhot to make of you, now yer comes the grand in that sort of style. Sometimes I fancies that you really are vhot you seem to be, and sometimes again I can't help thinking that you isn't. Howsomever, Bill trusted you, and he's rayther a deep 'un; so I dare say it's all right. As for my deceiving yer, it ain't in my natnre; 'specially when it goes agin my interest. Leave me to pnt them off from coming here; and only tell us vhen and vhere to meet again, and see if I don't vork the oracle for yer."

"To-night, at twelve, come to the same place, and you shall find that I can pay well for the business in which I mean to employ you," said the Phantom decisively; "bnt a look, a word, or gesture, that hints at a betrayal, and you will not again have the opportunity of giving either."

Slogger, reiterating his promise of acquitting himself faithfnlly in the task allotted to him, led the way to the extremity of the passages underground; and whilst so doing, pointed out to the Phantom, who had borne the light, a few rongh and uneven wooden steps, which led to a trap-door above, and which had evidently been constructed many years ago to give easier access to the place. This was described by the coiner to be the spot where an illicit distillery had been for a long time in operation, until some dispnte about a share in the profits had caused it to be discontinued. The trap-door had a communication with a stable situated down a narrow court at the back of a turning leading out of the Cornwall Road, and it was through this avenne that Slogger, who had been entrusted with the keys of the stable, had found his way to the vaults. His own mode of obtaining admission the Phantom did not choose to divulge.

Having seen the man safely out of the subterranean passages, the note-forger retraced his steps, and again inspecting the result of his night's labours, he reckoned the amonnt they would produce, and viewed the counterfeit wealth he had created with an exulting manifestation of triumph.

"Now, then," he soliloquised, as he replaced the ladder and retnrned to the house above, "but one more thousand, and the task to which I have devoted myself will be near completion. The fellow whom chance has thrown in my way will be a help to my project where I most needed it. I may then boldly avow the cause I have espoused, and throw off a disguise that will be no longer necessary."

As he reached the rooms above, now looking cold and dreary in the grey of the morning, as the rays struggled fitfully through the skylight and the crevices of the shutters, he threw his cloak around him, drew his cap slouchingly down over his features, and once more carefully locking the door behind him, strode away down the thoroughfare in the direction of the bridge.

Engaging a cab that was passing at the time near the toll-gate, the unknown immediately jnmped into the vehicle, and was conveyed to the terminus of the North Western Railway, where, waiting for the departnre of the first morning train, we may, for the present, leave him.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

For some days Thornton had been actively engaged in the occnpation which the affairs of Mr. Fitzroy Greene had furnished: not that those affairs were very extensive or complicated, nor likely to give rise to duties very ardnous in their nature; but railway matters, that always seemed to occupy a considerable share of Mr. Greene's time and money, were continually brought before him; and the correspondence connected therewith, under the dictation of the busy speculator himself, required his constant attention. He would also occasionally convey messages to the brokers in the city, and commnnicate orders to those shopkeepers that Mr. Greene patronized, which, added to his epistolary avocation, made the position he held seem rather ambiguous. Whether he precisely filled the situation of a clerk or porter Thornton often felt in doubt; bnt the treatment he received was too liberal and considerate to make him dissatisfied with his employment; and he rested content with the motley round of services which he daily performed, until something of a more permanent and promising character should present itself in his way.

Once, when he had been dispatched on a mission to the city, he had called in upon the old clerk at the stock-broker's, and told him the success of his application; and to thank him more efficiently, he had prevailed upon Mr. Crummins to accompany him to the little room of his favourite tavern, where he insisted upon defraying the expenditure of a small banquet in honour of his appointment, and which consisted of a steak cooked to wonderful perfection on a gridiron within their sight, and served on a pewter platter almost as hot as the fire from which it had been abstracted. With this extravagant repast before him, and inspired by the contemplation of the sea of rich brown gravy, and the accompanying pyramid of smoking potatoes, looking, as he symbolically expressed it, like little balls of flour, Mr. Crummins ventured to dilate upon the enjoyment of such indulgencies, and professed some uncomfortable misgivings lest the financial arrangements might be inadeqnate to the amount. But, finding that the foaming tankard of porter might be again replenished, and that even the additional luxnry of a small glass of rum and water—a beverage for which the clerk confessed a peculiar weakness—could be obtained without bringing his liberal entertainer to the verge of insolvency, Mr. Crummins grew quite enthusiastic in his praise; and, wishing to reciprocate the kindly spirit in which he had been treated, he got so far confidential as to communicate his address, hitherto a profound and undivulged mystery, and invite Thornton, in return, to take tea with him some day in his own apartments—an invitation presnmed to refer to a little room situated on the confines of a small street by the New Road, and to the peaceful seclusion of which the clerk with punctual regularity nightly retired at dusk.

But this was one of Henry's red-letter days; for his usual task was performed in Mr. Greene's own presence, in the first-floor drawing-room, a prim and formal chamber, looking down upon the river, where the arrangement for future sales and transfers were duly canvassed and considered, and where that specnlative gentleman and his intimate acquaintance, Mr. Parkins, who in all such business seemed to be the primary agent and suggester, built castles of aerial construction with singularly gratifying facility.

What was the exact nature of the intimacy that existed between them Thornton could not obtain a very clear idea. He saw Parkins continually whispering, contriving, and projecting; whilst Greene was satisfied in attentively listening, coinciding, and obediently concurring in the views the other entertained. That the accumulation of additional funds formed the principal object of their close connection there was sufficient evidence in the nature of their joint dealings to prove; but whether the money was furnished by Greene or his assiduous adviser it was difficult to conjecture.

Often, when left alone, would Thornton reflect upon the strange character of the man with whom he was now brought into contact. How he would argue for hours with the man of law upon a different side of the question, until a look, half threatening as it seemed to him, would make a sudden convert of the other; and then he would ponder upon the peculiarities manifested by Greene himself—how he would go on for a few minutes, dictating rapidly, and then fall into a sullen fit of abstraction, as if his thoughts were wandering away from the immediate subject in hand, and planning new schemes of some subtler nature for future discussion on the morrow. Altogether uncertain whether to like or dislike his employer, he saw enough during his daily intercourse with him to implant a feeling of curiosity concerning the past history of a man who, in the meridian of his life, seemed to be daily dreading the recurrence of poverty, and who appeared almost dependent for his income on the will of a person that he evidently held in aversion.

If the duties of the day were, however, accompanied by perplexities of this kind, and blended with a sort of instinctive presentiment that his services would not be long required, the welcome that awaited him on his return home gave a pleasant turn to the tenor of his meditations. His sister Emma, who was daily exhibiting, as she ripened into womanhood, some new charm that gave additional lustre to her face and person, was always ready, on the threshold, to greet him with a smile and a kiss; and the table, spread with the frugal supper, became a Lethean banquet, in which the cares and petty vexations of the world were nightly absorbed and forgotten. The love they felt for each other was strengthened by their mutually dependent position. And what a hallowed love is that between brother and sister! how soothing is that consciousness of a sister's affection—the endearing tie of a relationship that arms us anew for our battle with life, and whispering the bond of union in our ear—a mother's name! how it bids us struggle gallantly onwards, to secure the happiness of those so near and dear to us! It is consoling to know that the delicate feminine attentions we receive are those which are dictated by the purest and tenderest passion of our nature, and that in the bosom of a sister we may repose our sorrows with confidence, and feel the halcyon influence of a love that jealousy can never turn to hate, nor satiety to indifference.

The rigid economy with which Emma regulated the expenditure of the household, and the assistance derived from her brother, whose savings during the period of his country novitiate were not yet quite exhausted, had enabled her to send little Frederick to school, from which he regularly returned about dusk, bringing a dog's-eared book containing letters of extraordinary dimensions, and an appetite to correspond. It was Henry's favourite relaxation each evening to hear his younger brother repeat the lessons of the preceding day, whilst Emma kept industriously plying the busy needle on the materials that she obtained from the house at which she had been apprenticed, and to which she still regularly went as a remunerated assistant. Every now and then, glancing up from her work, she would steal a moment to trace the resemblance that existed between the two brothers, and perhaps think of the kind and gentle being that had there left behind the impress of her features, and then a crystal drop would come trickling down her cheek, unseen, and glisten on the fabric where it fell—a tear of tender sympathy—one of Nature's diamonds, that she gives from the mine of the heart as an ornament of priceless value to the humblest of her worshippers. But the evenings thus happily spent had their share of merriment too. The wonderful progress made by little Fred in his prime was the theme of constant pride and lively admiration. The curious combinations of letters that, devised by the quiet old gentleman whose portrait stared upon you from the title-page, looked as if he had been tying up the alphabet in double knots, and left them as puzzling legacies for juvenile readers to disentangle, were rapidly overcome, and the following week he was to march into that mystic region of orthography inhabited by words of two syllables, and wherein fanciful legends of good and bad boys were related in dissyllabic narratives, for their useful encouragement and example. Occasionally there would be a walk in the park, and then some prospect was certain to be held out, at an indefinite period of the future, that when Henry had made his fortune, and Emma had married some noble lord, who would be his particular friend, and of course deem himself only too highly honoured by such an alliance,—that they would occupy one of the large houses overlooking the green sward, and have marvellous apartments furnished therein, according to a plan never before contemplated out of the "Arabian Nights;" and then Emma would laughingly describe this period as being the same, when Henry would communicate to her that a certain countess had offered him her heart and hand, and that it would be highly improper on his part to refuse such an advantageous offer; whilst the imagination of Master Frederick taking fire at these glittering anticipations of coming prosperity, would call to mind the stories he had heard, and make him wonder, if he went out like other heroes to seek his fortune, whether he should encounter any giants on his progress.

It is a pleasant pastime, after all, to listen to these delusive promises of hope, even though the golden vision conjured up may prove a treacherous mirage. It is, perchance, better to enjoy by anticipation pleasures never to arrive, than mourn our actual sorrows. As far as the mere question of individual happiness is concerned, it is wiser to be absurdly sanguine than despairingly hopeless. We may at least have imaginative joys from the one, but we can only experience real misery from the other. For all practical purposes the optimists have literally the "best" of existence.

The faith in the future—that feeling naturally fresh and vigorous in the early days of youth—was the prominent characteristic of the Thorntons. They gave themselves up to the impulses of the moment, abandoned the heart to its own wayward emotions, and cherished an ardent belief—a fervent faith—in the good, the beautiful, and the true. Free from that incrustation of worldly-mindedness that so deadens our maturer perceptions, and renders our sympathies

less keen, they dreamed not of the vice, and fraud, and crime, that warped the actions of those around them; and, instead of regretting their unprotected position, they adopted that finer creed that teaches us always to hope for the best, and feel assured that even if the worst should come, there "is a soul of goodness in things evil," that time may lend us the philosophy to discover. It is the after trials of life that in most instances destroy this exquisite reliance on the world and on mankind. The mind becomes gradually corroded by the social acid dropped, day by day, upon its brightest surface; and at last, blackened and tarnished by the attrition, the reflection given forth is sombre and blemished like itself. *Hope* was their fairy prism, through which streamed the rays of the future, changing the sunbeam of the moment to a dazzling rainbow, and shedding over the duller surface of the present a brilliant colouring of variegated hues. Too often do we find these glorious delusions become more vivid as the spell is on the point of becoming broken. Like the dying dolphin that displays its brightest tints at the instant of expiring, the image becomes most beautiful the sooner it is to disappear. The bubble brightens ere it bursts, and when we look again, the little radiant sphere on which our eyes were fixed has become mere air—a dark and rayless void.

The house in which they resided was, as we have before said, in a quiet street by the Hampstead Road, where they rented a neatly furnished first floor. Those traditional monstrosities, the china poodles, the porcelain shepherds and shepherdesses, the rigid miniature cows, and the mottled shells and complicated inkstands that London landladies cram upon the mantel-piece in the apparent belief that they are essentially necessary to promote the happiness of the tenant, had all been swept away by the good taste of Emma, and neat little ornaments of her own were substituted in their stead. The first floor was chosen by Emma, after much weighty deliberation, in preference to the lower part of the house, as, though it entailed upon her some additional labour, as well as extra expense, many counterbalancing evils were avoided.

In a parlour, it is well known, you are expected by prescription to answer every appeal on the knocker, from the early milkman to the last postman; and have besides to act as porter to the other inmates of the house, taking in parcels for the "second floor front" or "third floor back," and involuntarily burthening yourself with every species of annoyance and commodity for the sake of people whom you only know by occasionally running against them without a light on the landing. The parlour lodger, too, is the recognised victim of the wandering Savoyard, who plays vindictively under the window, until the expected donation buys off the exasperating barrel-organ, and restores the reign of peace. In a street where the pavement is carried directly under the window, you have besides the periodical annoyance of children who clamber up upon your window-ledge from without, and make horribly white circumferences with their noses against the glass, inflicting upon you the necessity of constantly rushing out to drive them away, and making you feel perpetually uncomfortable under the gaze of these spectral Paul Pry's, who gain from such a commanding position a full view into the interior.

For these and some other reasons, derived from her metropolitan experience, Emma had preferred the intermediate station; but the height of her ambition, and the dream in which she frequently indulged, was the hope of being soon able to acquire a new abode in which she could call the little furniture about it her own property.

There is a kind of doubtful proprietorship about furnished apartments, which would provide a very fertile theme for reflection to a meditative mind; and the most unimaginative tenant can hardly fail, in the survey of that furniture around him, which is his merely for the time being, to connect the several articles of utility and ornament with the fortunes of the previous occupant of the room. The chair in which our predecessor has sat; the table that has borne the meal of the previous lodger as it now bears ours; the cupboards that have sustained on their shelves the same requisites for another's use that are now placed there for our own,—all tend to a speculation that, once suggested, has hardly any limits to its pursuit. Puzzling ourselves with odd questions that must, from their very nature, provoke only unsatisfactory answers, we begin to wonder what sort of an individual the former tenant was; whether it was adversity or prosperity that induced him to change his residence, obliging him to take either a worse or a better apartment; or whether he had become tired of the place, and so quitted it for the mere sake of novelty, to say nothing of the probability of a change in his condition, transforming him from a bachelor into a Benedict, and so involving the necessity of increasing his establishment? And then we involuntarily go back to the previous habitants, and in like manner raise curious interrogatories within ourselves as to their nature of occupation, their origin, and their destiny, marvelling whence they came, and whither they are gone; until in this way the room becomes a miniature type of the great world itself, showing us a phantom panorama of human beings, stirred by the same impulses as ourselves, governed by the same hopes and fears, and tenanting the same spot, who have all had their exits and their entrances, and left us alone to meditate on the transitory nature of matters mundane.

The mural inscription that affrighted Belshazzer would scarcely prove more startling, if those walls could in like manner reveal the history of the lodgers they have encompassed. To what scenes of mental anguish, of toiling industry, of hopes and fears, creating alternately a buoyancy of spirit and a crushing depression, may they have been the silent witness! What enduring patience, what earnest emotions of the heart, what instances of noble self-denial, what concealment of struggling pride, might then be unfolded, of which the outer world knows nothing! And all this is still going on, shrouded in the mysteries of back parlours, and secluded in the centre of a busy stream of traffic; which, after all, is but itself a small eddy, ever whirling round and round, and hardly observable in the great vortex of one day's spin of the earth upon its axis.

Often, when waiting for her brother, would thoughts and fancies such as these come floating through the mind of Emma. There was not much in the view across the street to interest her; for, like most of the buildings in these quiet neighbourhoods, the houses presented such an uniformity of design, that they might have been all fabricated by machinery after the same pattern. Windows of wearisome monotony, with every pane of provoking similarity, and cross-barred after the same fashion; a row of dingy blinds and red cords, and tassels distressingly alike; with here and there, along the window-sills, a collection of dusty plants that make dismal efforts at

blossoming,—form by no means lively objects of contemplation. Filmy forms, that might be the ghosts of former tenants for any bodily substantiality they appeared to possess, were seen occasionally to glide about through the obscurity of the rooms, and foster the drooping vegetation with shadowy jugs of water; but there was no identity about them, and all notion of their outward appearance was vague and indistinct. So, driven to her own reflections for amusement, the pursuit of some such train of thought as that we have indicated, or a dreamy reverie as to the future, became the chief mental recreation of her hours of solitude.

Of the landlady very little was seen, and nothing known. She was a little bustling body, with a very red face, and a very showy cap, that burst into a perfect blaze of pink ribbons every time circumstances required her presence at the door. There was a very small servant, too, in the house, who seemed to sleep upon some unknown part of the landing, and was generally supposed by the lodgers to be coming down perpetually from the top of the house to the bottom. The two rooms on the second floor were each let off to separate tenants: the back sleeping-room to a person who only occupied it occasionally, and who was said by Mrs. Marrable, the landlady, to be a commercial traveller, and "a perfect gentleman," who always paid his rent in advance, and with a bank-note; and the other to a rather erratic individual, who was an assistant to a law-stationer in Chancery Lane, and with whose little eccentricities the landlady deferentially put up on account of his having been with her "ever so long," a period of which those ignorant of feminine chronology would fail to have the most remote conception.

Bob Chuckers—for only by this familiar appellation did the individual last referred to wish himself to be known—was a prominent feature in Mrs. Marrables' establishment. He was the general authority on all matters of fashion and public amusements, and professed to enjoy an extensive acquaintance with both. His figure was almost the exact copy of one of those wax dummies seen outside the tailors' shops, and consequently he produced at first sight the rather unfavourable impression of being considered one of their walking advertisements. His face was round and full, with two merry little twinkling eyes, and a sharp perked-up nose that would have indicated a kind of stupid simplicity, had it not been for the knowing roguishness of a remarkably shrewd and expressive mouth. There was always a restless vibratory movement about his head, as if it constituted a detached portion of his frame, and he was cleverly balancing it upon his shoulders with a full consciousness that the feat was by no means one of easy performance. It would roll first on one side and then on the other, whilst his body would sway at the same time in sympathetic unison, until when the exact equilibrium was restored, and you could feel calm enough to resume the conversation, the eye would inquisitively travel down the ligatures of the neck, and wonder by what process its permanent safety was ensured. His hair was what is generally understood as inclining to red, and this inclination was particularly perceptible about the whiskers, that faintly emulated luxuriance; but they had stopped short half way down the cheek, and there apparently meeting with some invisible obstacle, they had shot indignantly out into a bushy clump, and turned back again. The costume, of which, as previously hinted, he seemed to be the peripatetic pattern, consisted of a dress coat, slightly the worse for wear, a waistcoat of brilliant colours, with broad lines spreading all over it, and a pair of noticeable trousers that could be identified afar off, and then looked something between an expanded railway map and an open chess-board. Altogether Mr. Chuckers was precisely one of those persons who, with a natural stock of unaffected good-heartedness, are foolish enough to spoil an excellent disposition by a frivolous assumption of rakish gentility, which they have neither the means nor the qualifications to support.

With his landlady Mr. Chuckers had had many a stout contest for the possession of the latch-key; a battle in which he had no sooner come off victorious than he availed himself of the privilege to be delivered with the early "milk" in the morning. A declaration of war would be then again proclaimed until Mr. Chuckers, with a knowledge of womanly weakness far beyond his years, would exhibit articles of peace in the form of savoury sausages, brought from some specific manufactory, in which Mrs. Marrables had a confiding faith, and, should the dawn have been very far advanced, the extra presentation would follow of a few nic-nacs, privately purchased for a singularly small sum in that emporium of every thing, the Lowther Arcade, where the shops seem to be ingeniously turned inside out, and the thoroughfare labouring under a severe visitation of French goods, Birmingham wares, and mosaic jewellery.

Under these circumstances, Mr. Chuckers was naturally looked upon as a very desirable lodger, and between him and Thornton a kind of intimacy arose, which was perhaps of quicker growth on account of the contrast exhibited in their respective characters. Those casual greetings that people living in the same house are apt to extend towards each other, gave rise by degrees to a closer acquaintance. Their look of recognition was at first exchanged for a friendly nod, the nod gradually expanded to a salutation, and the familiarity finally led, on Mr. Chucker's part, to a congratulatory shake of the hands and a conventional inquiry as to the state of health enjoyed by the "first floor" collectively. To Emma he paid the most marked and profound respect, and a box of water-colours with which he had presented Freddy, for spelling some word of unknown signification, immediately established him in the good opinion of the juvenile member of the family, and caused him to be looked up to for his patronage as a person of consequence.

So far this interchange of social courtesies had been continued, when one night, as Henry and his sister were at supper, chatting about their future prospects and the minor events of the day, a deferential tap was heard from a pair of knuckles outside, and, on the door being suddenly opened, the person of Mr. Chuckers was visible, vibrating more than usual, on the threshold.

"Ten thousand pardons, really, for disturbing you," cried Mr. Chuckers, labouring under evident confusion and distress of mind; "but have you got such a thing as a lucifer-match you could oblige me with? Sorry to give you the trouble, but my box is quite empty, and the landlady has gone out and locked up the kitchen."

"Come in, and help yourself," replied Thornton, with a desire to convert this opportunity into the means of returning the various little obligations previously rendered; "my sister, I believe, you have seen before."

"I have had that pleasure," responded the equilibrist, with a bow which at last got his head into the right place, and kept it there; "the young lady was

kind enough to accept from me a small parcel for my little friend here."

Master Frederick, who had been sheepishly rubbing the tip of his nose with a black paint—a pastime by no means calculated to improve his physiognomy—here left off; and, finding himself referred to, became unexceptionably quiet and attentive.

"You have not supped, Mr. Chuckers, I hope?" pleaded Emma, with a look that expressed a hearty welcome to their table if he had not.

That individual, being hard pressed, admitted that he could not conscientiously declare his remembrance of that meal; and so he was prevailed upon, with much trouble, and after many apologies, to take a crust of bread and cheese with them—an arrangement he would only consent to on the condition that Thornton should the next night become his guest in return.

During the repast, in which he scantily indulged, Bob Chuckers—for he insisted at once upon Thornton addressing him only by that name—grew quite philosophical in his dissertation upon lucifers, remarking how odd it was that to the loan of a lucifer he should be indebted for the pleasure that he then enjoyed; and from this reflection he digressed into an eloquent enumeration of the inconveniences that resulted from not having a proper supply of those useful articles in readiness; citing, as a case in point, that he remembered once, on his first arrival there, and when he was quite ignorant of the bearings of his apartment, being compelled to go to his bed in the dark. From this circumstance, he explained, arose a complication of disasters; for he had found in the morning that he had put his hat upon the fire-place in mistake for the table, and gone mysteriously to bed upon the window-ledge, curiously tucked up in the window-curtains—a lamentable series of bewilderments that proved a useful lesson to him afterwards.

When the cloth was removed, and Emma had retired with her little charge, who had been for some time industriously digging his fingers into the corners of his eyes, and vainly seeking by that process to establish a condition of manly wakefulness, Bob Chuckers went on to inquire the extent of Henry's acquaintance with the places of public entertainment; and finding that his information was upon those subjects exceedingly limited, he volunteered to initiate him into the secrets thereof; and as a proof that he might repose the utmost confidence in his experience, he began to recount the chief particulars of his metropolitan education, and how he had enjoyed the advantage of an early intimacy with what is popularly called "life."

From these disclosures, made in the confidence of the social hour, it appeared that his earliest recollections attached themselves to a stationer's shop, where he was always entangling himself with red tape, and running on messages, as the recognised errand-boy of the establishment. That from this equivocal position he had gradually risen to a place behind the counter, and that, as soon as he had got the evenings to himself, he had attached himself to an amateur theatrical society, where, according to his own statement, he had accomplished great triumphs. Several actors, too, of the minor theatres, he alleged to be his intimate friends, in token of which he called them by their Christian names, as "Dick," and "Tom," and "Bill,"—patronymic abridgments very much in vogue among the class patronised by Mr. Chuckers; and then he concluded by making Thornton promise that he would place himself under his escort and protection on the next or following evening, and forego, for one occasion, the quietude of his home for the sake of seeing what Mr. Chuckers emphatically termed "life," and from which he anticipated much unknown gratification would be derived as an essential consequence.

To all this Thornton gave a reluctant consent; and when Bob Chuckers, having at last obtained a light, retired to his dormitory, there was a friendly reminder that he was not to forget his promise; accompanied by a laughing admonition from Emma, that her brother was not to be led into any folly or extravagance on the occasion, under penalty of Mr. Chuckers being excluded from her good opinions for the future.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DAWN OF LOVE.

THE evening had closed in with a thick vaporous mist, and the dwelling of the bird-fancier looked in the dusky light more wretched and dreary than ever. The crowds of shoeless children that throughout the day had peered into the window with a wondering eye of childish curiosity had slunk in squalid groups back to their miserable hovels. The little patch of fresh turf in the cage of the skylark was in itself a marvel to those with whom the sight of green fields was a vision yet unbeheld; and the birds that hung about the doorway, and in the niches of the shop, were objects of exhaustless novelty, that made even the commonest songsters of the wood and grove seem wondrous rarities from foreign climes.

The two gas-lamps, separated by long intervals, glimmered faintly in the streets; the flickering lights from the petty chandler's store at the corner, shone feebly with a yellow glare; the gossips of the place had gathered round their favourite nook to retail the sorrows and scandal of their neighbours; and from the public-house at the opposite end was already heard the fierce dispute and noisy wrangling that would cease not till far beyond the midnight hour. And there, all alone, in the midst of that repulsive neighbourhood, the sole inmate of that lonesome tenement, stood the daughter of the bird-fancier, casting a wistful eye down the thoroughfare to see whether her father was approaching, and yet doubtful whether his arrival was to be dreaded or desired.

Two days had elapsed since he had quitted home, and during that period she had heard nothing of his proceedings. He had frequently stopped away of late in the same manner, but the circumstances under which he had last taken his departure filled her with fears for his safety. His disposition seemed to have become more coarse and brutalised, as he had renewed his acquaintance with the men who frequented the tavern adjacent, and his known connection with the worst characters who infested the low haunts about the waterside gave her reason for apprehending danger from such a connection.

It is curious to trace the formation of a character from the influence of surrounding circumstances. Amid a population stained with all those vicious habits of low life that a long residence in these squalid regions will generate and confirm, Mary Randall had preserved her purity as spotless as though the most vigilant care had guarded her education. Shunning the intimacy of the people who lived near her, and flung upon her own resources for the training of her mind, she had learned to have a firm reliance upon herself, and a strong belief in the nobility of a virtue that took no tarnish from the tainted atmosphere she breathed. There were a few books ranged upon the

shelves in her little parlour, that constituted her library, and from these she drew the solace of her lonely hours, whilst her link with nature was the carol of the birds that formed her only companions, and to whose care and comfort she daily devoted herself, with zealous attention, content enough if they but trimmed their plumage and repaid her with a song.

It was not, perhaps, altogether fanciful to believe that these kindred associations were visible in the impression she created. In the depths of her glad blue eye one could picture the gleam of azure left in the vault of heaven among the dark clouds rifted by the summer storm; gazing on those light brown tresses of her hair, one could recall dreamy spots in some quiet old forest, roofed over with arching trees, carpeted with primroses and violets, and revealing bright glimpses of green among the entangled leaves; her low soft silvery voice came upon the ear like the babbling of a brook in June, or the notes of a thrush at sunset; and her footfall, light and noiseless, might have been the echo of a bird's wing, when, pausing from its aerial flight, it is folded back with a gentle rustle in its nest among the foliage.

It was not without some reason that many a passenger, passing down that street, turned back to look upon the fair form and gentle face of the bird-fancier's daughter.

A long, long hour had passed away since twilight, and Mary Randall still retained her place upon the threshold. At last, when all expectation of her father's return had been abandoned, and when the only assistant she had—the son of an honest shoemaker across the road, and by whom Mary was held in great estimation—had closed the shutters for her, and taken his departure, she withdrew to her little room at the back, placed a light upon the table, and resigned herself to another evening of weary loneliness.

She had become absorbed in her favourite volume, an ancient book of voyages and travels, that had been left there years before by a veteran sailor, who had lodged for a short time in the house; and with her imagination wandering far away from the humble home of the bird-fancier, Mary was thinking of the perils of the old navigators on the broad Pacific—of

the coral caverns of the coast of Malabar, and the wild scenes of adventure depicted among the tangled forests of the interior, when a sharp summons from without scattered her dreams in an instant, and springing to the door, she found the intruder upon her meditations was her father. He was accompanied by an elderly man, very shabbily attired, who, though a stranger to her, will be at once recognised by the reader as Hawkins, the miserable miser who had been the companion of Randall on the occasion when he first appeared within the pages of our history.

"Come, Poll," said the bird-fancier, with a coarse greeting as he passed her; "this is Mr. Hawkins, a friend of mine—you must make him welcome. Let us have some spirits and hot water, girl; come, quick; what have you got to give us for supper? We have journeyed a long way, and begin to want something, I can tell you."

"There is but little, I am afraid, father," observed Mary, as, struggling to assume a cheerful manner, she went to the cupboard, and obtained therefrom the remains of the joint on which Randall had last supped prior to his departure. "I have had but little appetite myself, and being uncertain whether you would return to-night, I had made no preparations for your arrival."

"You waste half your time on such nonsensical stuff as this, I suppose," cried Randall, flinging the open book that was on the table to the other side of the apartment; "no wonder customers get scarce, when girls get too clever and proud to attend to their business."

Without venturing on a reply that she knew might tend to aggravate the fury of his temper, Mary only appealed against the unfounded charge with a supplicatory look; and placing the food upon the table, and settling the kettle in readiness upon the crackling fuel, she drew her chair nearer the fireplace, that she might fan the embers into a more congenial blaze.

In the meantime the bird-fancier and his companion made such havoc with the meal provided as the keen appetites of two travellers might be supposed to induce, and, merely turning her pale face at intervals towards the group as it was lit up in the fire-light—for the candle shed but a faint illumination—the girl strove to penetrate in the expression of their features the nature of the business that had brought her father and his newly-found acquaintance together.

It was a curious combination of figures. The thick-set, muscular form of Randall, whose eyes, turned askant at Hawkins, seemed to remind him of some dark deed of villany they were about to consummate, contrasted forcibly with the crouching, cringing manner of the old miser, whose miserable dress a beggar would have spurned, and who, in sly, foxy glances, looked up ever and anon at Randall with a crafty gaze, that carried with it all the indications of bold atrocity and cunning treachery. To make up the picture, there was the red light of the quivering flame casting a flush of animation on the cheek of Mary, who sat neglected, if not unnoticed, watching the rapid changes of their countenances; but, from the guarded manner in which they spoke, failing to obtain from words the slightest clue to the nature of the project in which they were manifestly engaged.

The supper over, the bird-fancier seemed to become suddenly conscious of his daughter's presence.

"Now, then, Poll," said Jacob Randall, with a rough show of affection, as he wound his brawny arm round her slender waist, "put the grog on the table, girl, and get to bed. You must need rest after so much sitting up for me. There, now," he added, as a tear trembled involuntarily in her eye, "if I was harsh with you just now, I never meant it. You know my way, and I am getting more old and cross than I used to be. It is all over now; set the glasses, child, and go to your room, for I and Mr. Hawkins have some private business to arrange together."

With a feeling, almost instinctive, that this forced kindness, and the display of an unwonted consideration for her health, had its origin in a wish, upon his part, to relieve them from the embarrassment of a third person being present, Mary faltered a few words in reply to her father, and, arranging the table as required, she took a light from the recess, made an obeisance to Hawkins, with visible repugnance, and then departed to her room above.

The upper part of the house consisted only of two rooms that were habitable; a small attic that had formerly served as a sleeping-room being now completely choked with lumber. The staircase leading thither consisted of a double flight of steps approached by a door from the parlour below, and terminating above on a landing which gave entrance to the two adjoining rooms, occupied by Jacob Randall and his daughter. On the right of this landing was another short ascent, composed of about half-a-dozen stairs that led up to the attic above-mentioned, and which had been built out over a workshop at the back.

From these details it will be seen that, when the door in the back parlour that communicated with the staircase was closed, all means of ingress or egress between the upper and the lower portions of the building became impracticable, except through that medium; and therefore, when, after his daughter left, Randall took the key out of the lock and fastened it on the inside, he knew that he had adopted a certain mode of preventing Mary returning to the parlour until he was disposed to effect her liberation.

"And now," began Randall, as, having taken this precaution, he dropped the key into his pocket and resumed his seat—"now I have clapped Poll under hatches, and so prevented any chance of our being interrupted, let's fill our glasses and talk about business."

"Ha! it was well done, cleverly done, Mr. Randall; you have made him give up all—he has not a penny left, not a penny," muttered the old miser, tilting his chair nearer towards the fire, in which he seemed to behold the scene re-enacted that had given him such delight. "We were too quick upon him—too clever, with all his cunning, to let him escape us. But it has cost me a large sum, a very large sum after all," brooded the speaker in a lower tone, and adding with a heavy sigh, as if mournfully regretting to himself the payment, "Forty pounds—forty pounds!"

"Why you niggardly old hunks," exclaimed Randall, tossing off a glass of the raw spirit, which he disdained to incorporate with water; "and do you begrudge paying me forty pounds for being the means of saving you five hundred? If I thought you had double the amount about your covetous old body, I'd screw it out of you before you left here, to teach you liberality for the future."

"No, no, Mr. Randall," rejoined Hawkins deprecatingly, and exhibiting some alarm at the tone in which he had been addressed; "I do not begrudge it—it was well earned—you had him safe—but it was a large sum for me to pay, I who am so poor, so very poor."

"Come," interrupted Randall, with an oath, "that nonsense won't go down with me, who know better.

I don't want to learn how rich you are, or what you want to do with your money—though a hole in the earth is a queer place for a cash-box. There's nothing of the thief about me. You got me to do a job for you, and I did it. So far that account is squared up between us, but you said you had something more to tell me about this youngster, and now I have brought you in here for the purpose, where we can have a quiet talk about it to ourselves, I should like to hear what more you want me to do?"

"Then hark! a word in your ear, Mr. Randall," continued Hawkins in a hoarse whisper, as he bent himself nearer the bird-fancier; "I told you the lad was my nephew, that he was robbing me, but it is not so. He is no relation of mine, though he believes that I am his uncle; and when he thought he was taking my gold from me, the foolish youth was but robbing himself;" and with a fiendish chuckle the miser stretched forth his thin, bony hands, and with a trembling movement conveyed the steaming tumbler to his lips.

"Well, hang me, if I can see what you are driving at!" exclaimed Randall, bluntly; "I always thought you something between a fool and a knave, and I shall now be inclined to think you a bit of a madman. Do you mean he only took away his own property?"

"Patience, patience, my dear Mr. Randall, and you shall hear all; I will disguise nothing from you, for I want your assistance, and you will find that I cannot do otherwise than rely upon you; but you must be my friend, my good genius, that will help me out of my troubles, and you must be careful to keep my secret safe, and then there will be money for both of us as long as we live, Mr. Randall. Think of that—the money—think of that," and the miser ground the palms of his hands together, as he fixed his small and withered eyes upon the face of his companion to watch the effect of his communication.

"Now you begin to talk something like reason," returned the bird-fancier, feeling more interested in the other's discourse, as he saw that they were to be linked by some communion of interests, though in what way he did not very clearly comprehend. "So you have a scheme in your head for this lad, have you, and want me to assist you in it?"

"Yes, yes," added Hawkins, quickly; "but remember, be cautious—be secret, for if we are overheard—" and he glanced uneasily around.

"Psha! no fear of that," pursued Randall, "for there is no one in the house but my girl, and she is safe in bed by this time."

"Well, then," continued the miser, "I will tell you exactly how the case stands, and you shall judge from that what I had better do. There is a long story about it to be revealed some day; but I will give you the simple facts as briefly and as clearly as I can." The speaker paused for a moment, drank deeply from his glass, and then seeing that Randall was leaning forward and listening attentively, he resumed:

"Sixteen years ago I was in business as a conveyancer and estate agent in the city. My partner was a shrewd, active man, with a thorough knowledge of the law; and, though much younger than myself, we contrived to suit each other tolerably well, and our connections were every day increasing. Among our other clients was one who had a claim upon a large estate that had been thrown into Chancery, and finding that he was a lineal descendant of the person to whom it had originally belonged, we lent him from time to time the money to prosecute his title. To prove the validity of his claims, he yielded up to our possession the copy of a will, letters, and other documents of legal value, that ultimately established his right; but before the decree in Chancery was pronounced our client died, and left an only son to inherit this vast property."

"I now fancy I can see some clue to this mystery," interposed Randall; "that son is this very Alfred Howard, as you call him—the one whose person I have assisted to secure."

"Exactly, but listen. About the time when the result of this long-disputed case was made known, my partner and I had a quarrel, arising from some disagreement connected with the share of the expenses we were mutually to bear. We separated, but before he left he managed to obtain from the cabinet where I kept my papers the documents deposited by our client. Fortunately, in the haste with which he had gathered up the documents I speak of, he had left the most important ones behind, and therefore, though he possessed enough to acquaint him with the evidence produced in a case of which I had had the chief management, he was not only without the most conclusive papers, but altogether ignorant of a portion of the title which enabled the claimant to receive the rents of a number of houses situated in Goodman's Fields, and the land adjacent. Whether he ever made any use of the knowledge *he* possessed, I know not; but I should imagine, finding that so many links were broken in his evidence, that he never thought it worth while to inquire after the real heir. I had, however, my own project to work out. I got a trace of the boy, took him into my office for a short time, then changed my abode to get rid of disagreeable surmises that might be formed, and had him educated as my own nephew, in which belief I brought him up."

"What a cunning old rascal, to be sure!" affirmed Randall, with a complimentary nod to the wily usurer.

"Ay, it was a wise plan, was it not?" said Hawkins his eyes blinking with delight at the roguery he had practised. "Well, I had carefully preserved all the necessary proofs, and to work I went; and having established him as the indisputable heir, I got myself appointed the trustee to receive the rentals of the houses in Goodman's Fields until he became of age. When I got the first year's dues, and saw the money rising visibly up before me in a glorious pile of yellow gold, I became mad with the intensity of my delight. A new life seemed to dawn within me—a strong and overwhelming passion, which some called avarice, took possession of my soul. I daily thirsted and craved for more; my insatiate appetite for gold became a raging desire that I had never hitherto experienced."

"Well, I have often heard there was a strange wish among you misers to grasp at all you could," remarked Randall, noticing with a cold look of contempt the delirious joy that became apparent in the other's wan and furrowed features. "What use were you going to make of all this?"

"That," said Hawkins, in reply, "was a question that caused but little thought. It was not that I had any decided object to gain in thus accumulating the money, but it was a fine thing to see it visibly growing and expanding before my eyes. I began to love it for itself, not for the pleasures or power it would yield—for I knew that when these were got, the golden source would be becoming gradually exhausted. But I watched it, as a mother would a child, rising day by day into a nobler form; and as its bulk increased I lessened my expenses, that no spendthrift waste might harm the image that I worshipped. It was against this wish of mine to hoard

up every sixpence that young Howard was ever speaking, and I hated him for it. I longed to rid myself of him. I told him of fortunes made at sea, of glorious gains that awaited those who risked the chances of another clime; and at last he yielded to the subtle persuasion that I was artfully exerting, and he went."

"Glad enough, I'll be bound, to escape from such a covetous old uncle, that begrudged him every penny he spent," said Randall, with a half jesting tone, and again replenishing his glass; "but do you mean to tell me that you sent the lad off without a coin to help him on the road?"

"He would go; he never even came to bid me farewell—I who had fed and clothed him from a child," pursued the miser. "He had prevailed upon some soft-hearted captain to take him to the West Indies as a cabin-boy, or something of that kind, and I was too much rejoiced at his departure to inquire further what became of him. I hoped never to see him more; for, as I tell you, he was an object of my hatred, and his eyes never looked into mine but I dreaded lest he should have become possessed by chance of my secret, and was but thinking of the misery and ruin to which a word would reduce me."

"This happened, I suppose, some time back?"

"It was five years ago," continued Hawkins; "he was then nearly sixteen, and a weak and sickly-looking lad. I thought the climate to which he went would have carried him off, and that I should have been safe in the early death to which I had hoped he was destined. I had only one fear then to harass me. I dreaded being robbed; and the more I had to lose, the more I trembled for the risk I ran. But I contrived to cheat the world famously, after all. Except on the day when I collected my rents, I wore these miserable clothes, and people looked upon me as a beggar. My money I had concealed in places where I knew none would find it but myself; and again I was free from every anxious care."

"Yes, it was on one of those expeditions that I first became acquainted with you," cried Randall. "What a sly old hunks, to be sure, you were! Getting up at four in the morning to bury a bag of gold in the marshes! Ha! ha! I shall not forget in a hurry the start you gave when I stole noiselessly behind you, slapped you on the back, and asked you whether you wanted a cage for the yellow-hammers you had found;" and the bird-fancier indulged himself with a hearty laugh at the reminiscence thus suggested.

"True, Mr. Randall, it was a great fright for me," assented the miser, who endeavoured to join in the merriment thus excited; but his shrivelled physiognomy only assumed a more rueful and wretched aspect under this melancholy effort at mirth; "it was for the purpose of concealment that I bought that hovel, and many a day have I gone there silently and secretly to gloat over my treasure, and increase it by fresh additions. But I knew the chance of discovery was very small, and I had other hiding-places besides."

"Well, you had a queer taste for amusement, I must confess," sneered the bird-fancier; "but the boy—what became of him? How was it he managed, after all, to find you out?"

"I was about to tell you that," resumed Hawkins, with a rapid utterance, that evinced the excitement occasioned by this return to the subject on which he had first spoken. "The five years had flown like as many days. I was so certain of his never returning, that I had almost ceased to remember his connection with the business, when one afternoon, as I was entering my little house in the Mile End Road, a young fellow, dressed like a midshipman, tapped me familiarly on the shoulder, and asked me if I had forgotten him. It was young Howard. He had recognised me in an instant; and though the timid, irresolute look of the boy had changed to the firmer glance of maturity, and the warmth of a foreign sun had bronzed his pallid cheek, I felt his features were too vividly impressed upon my memory to be mistaken. He told me that he had been several voyages in the ship in which he had first embarked, and that through the favour of the captain, with whom he had become a great favourite, he was now the second mate of the vessel. Believing me still his uncle, he had brought me several presents from abroad, and I, in the foolish weakness of my heart, received him into the same house. I before told you how I hated him. Now that he had returned, my hatred doubled in intensity. His very presence under the same roof seemed a curse upon me. He began to ask me for money to supply his extravagances, and was more than ever eager to learn about his parents, who, in a plausibly-constructed tale, I had previously informed him had died during his infancy. By what means I know not, but he had ascertained that this story was false, and he contrived to discover that my poverty was not so great as I had represented. One night, after I had been away on my regular quarterly errand, I found, on my return, that he had broken open the closet where I kept his title to the estate concealed, and with the money and papers that were in the boxes there deposited he fled."

"And you of course tracked him like a blood-hound?" observed Randall.

"I knew, fortunately," continued Hawkins, "the name of the vessel in which he was to sail; and I would have set the police upon him, had I dared to risk the exposure which would follow. But it was too dangerous an experiment to try; and so, my good friend, you know I got you to assist me in obtaining restitution."

"And I should think you ought to be satisfied with the way in which it has been done," added Randall; "you have got back your money and the boxes by the paper which you made him sign; and now you have both those in your possession, what more can you require?"

"Ha! your threat, and the slender fare which we gave him, soon brought him to reason, did it not?" ejaculated the miser with exultation; "he was glad enough to sign any thing to procure his release, though he did storm and rave about it at first, didn't he?"

"Well, no matter about that. What you wished you had, and what you wanted me to do I did. Now tell me what further roguery I am to do, and get well paid for, in this affair?"

"Ay! that brings us near to the great question, Mr. Randall," said the other, subsiding into a contemplative mood. "One glance at those documents which he stole from me, and which I have recovered with your help, would tell him all that I have been so long struggling to conceal; and I should be a ruined man, Mr. Randall—beggared beyond a hope of retrieving myself."

"And you fancy, then, that even in the short time that has intervened, he has possessed himself of that information?"

"Just so; and it was for that reason, before we returned to liberate him to-morrow, that I wanted to consult you upon the subject. I have related all to you, Mr. Randall, without disguise; for you have been my friend, and I know you will not desert me and

betray me now. What course shall I adopt? What would yon advise me to do?"

"Hum!" hesitated Randall; "that is a question easier asked than replied to. You want the lad got out of the way, I see, and it is clear enough that if he knows all this, or snfficient of it to pnt him on the track of the property to which he is entitled, your career will not be a very long one. But suppose you make a merit of necessity, tell him all the particulars as yon have told them me, and share with him every thing yon get."

"No, no," quickly returned the old man; "I have thonght of that, but it cannot be. There is a deadly enmity between us both; he feels it as well as I. He wonld avenge the slights and deprivations of his past life by denouncing me to the officers of justice. And then, to snrrender all that I have expended years in bringing together! No, we must think of some other scheme, some safer mode than that."

"There is but one alternative, then," said Randall; "and that is——"

"*Murder!*" hoarsely insinuated Hawkins, clntching the hand of the bird-fancier, and looking eagerly at him with a demoniacal glance that only awaited a similar response to confirm the horrible thoughts that were rising in his mind.

"I had thonght of that," added his companion, significantly; "bnt——"

There was a creak upon the stair.

A sudden look of alarm from Hawkins convinced the bird-fancier that the sound was not imaginary. Snatching the light from off the table, he unlocked the door, without speaking a word, and ascended to his daughter's room. But Mary appeared so fully in the enjoyment of a profound sleep, that he hesitated to disturb her repose; and his suspicions being dispelled, he returned to the parlour, and, having adopted the same precantion as before, renewed the conversation.

"The old timbers here," he observed qnickly, "are not the quietest in the world. They give occasionally, as the weather changes; but I knew that there could be no other footstep than that of Mary's, and she is sleeping soundly enough. Now then to look at this matter closely. If he has really seen these papers you describe, there is little doubt that the first use he will make of his liberty will be to pay off some old scores he has chalked up against you;—to prevent that he must be quietly provided for; and the lonely place where we have at present secured him will give us a capital opportunity for keeping the affair dark. But if, on the other hand, he has never looked into them, and merely fancies you are thus severe because he has walked off with the boxes, why we may turn him adrift without further mischief, and let him shift for himself as he likes."

"Bnt we must be certain that he knows nothing of them, Mr. Randall," replied Hawkins; "we must watch him narrowly; and if a look or a word should show that he is aware of his position, you must grasp at his throat with your strong arm, Mr. Randall, and silence him for ever."

"And the agreement between us is to be that yon shall give me one half of the money that you have thus scraped together?" added Randall, interrogatively.

"Yes, half shall be yours; it will be well earned. I shall begrudge it not, so that yon destroy this adder that crawls upon my path," replied Hawkins.

"It will be a chance worth venturing for," mused Randall; "the prize is too good to let it slip niggardly through my fingers, and the money would enable me to make Mary happy, too, for life. Enough, I consent," he added qnickly, breaking from his reflections into a londer tone, and at the same time starting to his feet; "bnt we must away to the marshes at once, for if I stop to consider that which you have proposed, my mind might change, and my conscience might get the npper hand of me again. It is now within a few minutes of midnight," he observed, referring to an old Dntch clock that hung against the wall; "if we start now, we might get there soon after daybreak, before any body is stirring, or likely to see us on the road; and we can then come back here to breakfast quietly, and none be a whit the wiser for onr absence."

"That is exactly what I was about to snggest to you myself, Mr. Randall," was the rejoinder; "we conld take the boat, which is still lying ready for us at Limehonse Stairs, and then it is bnt a short distance from the other side of Barking Creek to the barn where we have left him carefully secured. Let it be done to night, and the sunrise shall behold us rich men. We may then defy them all to take the money from us;" and as he said this, Hawkins shuffled up from his seat, and throwing over his shoulders an old coat that he had abandoned on his entrance, he impatiently signified to the bird-fancier his readiness to depart.

Randall, with his face flushed from the qnantity of raw spirits he had imbibed, possessed himself of the stont oaken stick that was the companion of his rambles when pursuing his usual avocations, and tightening round his body the thick frieze-coat he wore, he tested the security of the fastenings of the passage communicating with the upper rooms, extinguished the light, and then leading Hawkins back through the shop, he closed the door behind him, and struck into one of the streets leading down to the watorside.

At the same moment Jacob Randall and Hawkins quitted the house, Mary, who had listened with breathless eagerness to the latter portion of the conversation that had taken place between them, hnrried to the door that divided the staircase from the parlour, and found, to her unspeakable surprise and dismay, that the key had been turned in the lock, and consequently she was a prisoner until her father's return. Her feeble strength in vain expended itself against the barrier, and with a horrible consciousness of the deed that her parent had left with the intention of committing, she found herself compelled to return to her room from sheer exhaustion, and there deplore the fatal nature of his resolve, as well as her nttor inability to prevent it.

With a presentiment that the unwonted return of the bird-fancier with a companion, and that companion one of snch a sinister aspect as she found Hawkins to possess, foreboded evil, it was some time before she could compose herself to slumber, and even then her sleep was broken by the most intense and fearful dreams. Waking snddenly from one of these, she had re-kindled her light, and unable longer to endnre the suspense, she was about descending the stairs to learn whether the sound of voices still continued, when the tread of her footsteps aroused Randall's attention, and she had only just contrived to extinguish the light and regain her position, when he entered her apartment. Satisfied that he entertained no belief of her wakefulness, Mary had with a greater precaution, and with a noiseless step, again approached the door; and listening with bated breath to the words that came from the lips of the two speakers

in a low and subdued tone, she had caught the intelligence of a projected crime that made the blood thrill coldly in her veins, and excited emotions within her breast of the most painful and agonising description.

She well knew that dissipated habits, and the reckless indifference he had evinced since his reverse of fortune and the loss of her mother, had made him fierce and brutal in his actions; but she had now for the first time learned that his heart had become so thoroughly depraved as to induce him, for the sake of gain, to become a murderer. She trembled at the frightful prospect before her. Imagination already pictured the victim struggling in his grasp, and the retributive explation of the murderer on the scaffold. She shuddered as the thought flashed across her, that she herself would be linked with the horrors of the deed, and that the gaze of thousands would be directed towards her as the daughter of him who had imbrued his hands in the blood of a fellow-creature, and who had perished ignominiously by the rope of the hangman. Her brain whirled with the multitudinous images that succeeded each other as she reflected upon the event that a few hours would decide, and then, with her hands clasping her burning brow, and her eyes scorching with a fire that no tears could quench, she sank upon her knees before the bed, and prayed fervently for her parent's preservation from the fearful sin that he was about to perpetrate.

A ray of hope, faint as the feeble twilight of the coming morn that now glimmered through the casement, gave her a slight encouragement. They had taken the boat, and, by the windings of the river, it would be some time ere they could gain their destination. Could she reach the place before them, and warn the intended victim of his danger, she might yet prevent the execution of their foul design. From what she had overheard she knew where the intended scene of the crime was situated, and, from having accompanied her father to the neighbourhood on his snaring excursions, she was acquainted with the barn that had been mentioned. Wild and romantic as the effort seemed, she, nevertheless, cherished a strong belief that her intervention would not be useless; and, with the same rapidity that the idea suggested itself, she hastened to put it into execution.

To attire herself in such costume as would be least likely to attract notice was the first impulse; and then taking from a basket of tools, left in the adjoining room, a few implements that she hoped would enable her to force back the lock, she next devoted her energies to the task of self-liberation. The door, however, resisted all her strength as before, and, unable to reach the fastening that was on the other side, it was with a feeling of bitter disappointment that she abandoned the attempt, and turned her attention to some other means of procuring egress from the house.

A moment's reflection pointed out the attic above as furnishing the most probable mode of escape; and, accordingly, rushing up the stairs, she threw back the door of the lumber-room, which had not been opened for some time, and eagerly examined the window and its distance from the ground. Her heart fluttered with joy as she found the slanting roof of the workshop that projected underneath would enable her to descend with safety, and she saw that from thence a low wall, forming the boundary of a court at the back, might be reached with ease. There was now no hesitation as to the course she should pursue. A light spring to the roof, a careful movement along the intervening wall, a short leap to the ground, a rapid winding through the narrow alley, and Mary Randall found herself in the wide street beyond, without a witness to her flight or a straggling pedestrian to intercept her progress.

No thought of personal danger deterred the brave and noble-minded girl from risking her own life to save that of a fellow creature. Conscious of the purity of her intentions, and supported by the earnest wish to rescue her father from the temptation into which he had been drawn, she felt no dread of the insults or rough usage she might encounter. So swift, indeed, were her movements, that where there was a party of labouring men lingering round the late tavern or the early breakfast house, and one made a casual remark upon her appearance, she was away and out of sight before the others could identify the subject of it; and with her shawl purposely thrown in negligent folds over her figure, and a thick handkerchief enshrouding her face from observation, it was not easy to guess, in the obscurity that prevailed, the personal attributes of the fleeting form that glanced like a flying shadow along those lonely and deserted streets.

With a view to have help at hand, in case of molestation, Mary had hitherto kept the open road, and as the light of the morning increased, she feared lest her unprotected state, and her journey through the heart of a district held in such ill-repute, might, at that unwonted hour, provoke remark. Occasionally, there rumbled past her a market-cart, laden with the produce of the eastern suburbs; but the driver was generally fast asleep among the fruit and vegetables, and the horse, confident in the knowledge of the old familiar track, was drowsily sauntering along at its own discretion. As the houses, with shops attached to them, looking grey and lifeless in the advancing dawn, were gradually left behind, and the broken range of buildings that marks the outskirts of the metropolis took their place, a sense of loneliness began to steal more sensibly upon her; but, encouraged by the few persons she had encountered, and the assurance that she had proceeded thus far in safety, she pursued her way with unabated speed. No feeling of fatigue had yet retarded the pace at which she first set out; but had this not been the case, the indomitable strength of mind which had urged her to this bold effort would have enabled her successfully to have combated with the physical exhaustion it produced.

At last the signs of human habitation no longer flanked the roadway, and low hedgerows stretched along the thoroughfare instead. Trees, with their summer verdure thick upon them, and their branches spreading forth amid a rich luxuriance of leaves, started up by the wayside and rustled timidly in the first breath of morning. Birds began to twitter and chirrup among the foliage, reminding her of the home she had left behind—perhaps for ever; and the broken outline of some roadside tavern, with its picturesque trough and swinging sign, would next loom upon the landscape, with its newly-painted inscription announcing the combined attractions of tea-garden and bowling-green, staring down upon the eye with a misty, lustreless effect. Then came an occasional stile, with a footpath spreading away across the fields, and the time-worn rails and posts, hacked and hewn with broad initials clumsily cut into the mouldering wood. Then there was a lane, deeply indented with the ruts of the hay-waggons, and with a battered finger-post at the corner, which had long ago ceased to direct the passer-by. Into one of these lanes, with a recollection of the open ground to which it led,

Mary now turned, and with a beating heart, as she found herself nearing her destination, she sped down the declivity at a more rapid rate, eagerly noticing such landmarks on her way as convinced her she was following the right path.

The lane ended by a lone farm-house, the inmates of which were all asleep; and the sonorous bark of the watchful house-dog, as he shook himself out of the straw, and came shambling out from the kennel to gaze upon her with a mistrustful air of suspicion, alone fell upon her ear, as she hurried by. There was an old gate swinging loosely upon its hinges, which she pushed past, and then came upon a sheep-track among the marshes, where the long rank grass came thickly up, beaded and bending with the heavy crystal dew. Around her were vast dreary-looking pastures, enlivened only by a few sleepy flocks of sheep and groups of cows, that were cropping the short sweet herbage of the neighbouring meadows. Towards the river-side — the breeze from which was now making itself felt as it swept over her face, warmed and glowing with the brisk exercise she had taken— the land was one flat and swampy expanse of green, unvaried by the appearance of a single object to break the monotony that prevailed. After having for some time traversed in this direction the tortuous footpath—if so slight an indication of a track deserved the name—Mary saw, at the distance of about half a mile, the out-building rise up before her, which she rightly surmised was the old barn to which Hawkins had referred; and now, anxiously looking round to see that no person was approaching towards the same spot, she hurried onward with as rapid a movement as the yielding nature of the sward allowed.

During the last half hour, the lingering vestige of the thick murky mist of the preceding night had cleared away, and the sun had risen in all the glorious splendour of a summer morning. The buzzing sound of insect melody was again awakened into life; the lowing of the kine afar off mingled pleasantly with the tinkle of the distant sheep-bell, and the sky, streaked with those matchless tints that usher in a June morning, appeared to reflect in its emblazoned canopy of clouds the jewelled treasures which had been engulphed in the ocean from which it seemed, fresh and radiant, to emerge. A throb of grateful gladness rose within her heart, and Mary felt that this was not the scene which the red hand of a murderer should desecrate with a deed of blood.

As she neared the precincts of the barn, a new terror seized upon her mind. Had she, after all, arrived too late—and had the crime been consummated? A deathlike stillness prevailed around, and she listened timidly at the threshold of the hovel for some indication of a living being within. Tortured by the dread of finding that, with all her haste, her father had gained the spot before her, she hesitated to speak, lest she should find her worst surmises confirmed. A faint gasp, as of some one breathing with difficulty, nerved her to the task, and raising her voice as much as her faltering breath would enable her, she exclaimed: "Speak, sir, quick; your life or death depends upon your answer. Are you here within these walls against your will?"

"Oh, hasten to free me from this vile imprisonment," returned a voice from the interior. "I have exhausted myself with shouting for assistance during two long days and nights, and I am hoarse with my exertions. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, distinctly," replied Mary, now satisfied that her errand of mercy had not been undertaken in vain, and that she had correctly understood the place mentioned by the miser. "Your life is in imminent danger. Within a brief time from this a man named Hawkins, accompanied by another of a fierce disposition and powerful strength, will be here to intimidate, if not murder you. Lose not an instant in effecting your escape."

"Alas!" continued the prisoner, "my hands are bound, and I am helpless; and if you are a woman, as I judge from the tones of your voice as they reach me here, there is not much chance of making a successful resistance. But hasten, I beg of you, to the nearest dwelling, and procure me a knife by which I can sever these cords that have been twisted round my wrists, and which my teeth have in vain tried to bite asunder."

"There is not a house within a mile from here," cried Mary, "and the delay would be fatal to you. But even if your hands are free, I find there is a chain and padlock on the door, that would be still beyond your power or mine to break away."

'With my hands at liberty I might reach the window above," exclaimed the other, eagerly; "if you have no knife, a sharp flint might answer the purpose."

Mary thought of the implements that she had abstracted from her father's room to procure her own liberation, and then remembered that the chisel with which she had so fruitlessly essayed to burst open the lock was still in her possession, placed in her bosom during the hurry of her flight. Producing this, and thrusting it beneath the crevice of the door, she had the satisfaction of finding that its aid had proved most serviceable, for a few minutes afterwards she heard a sudden jerk, followed by an ejaculation of delight, and an intimation from within announced to her that the rope had been rent in twain.

The padlock on the door, however, seemed to present an insuperable obstacle to his release, and she was lamenting the hazard of further delay in forcing this, when she saw, to her ineffable gratification, a handsome, manly figure emerging from the window of the barn above, and before she could express her congratulations on his escape, he had clambered to the side, leaped gracefully to the earth, and was pouring forth his thanks to her in eloquent language, for so effectually coming to his timely assistance. Driving the chisel into the wall, he had gained a footing, which had enabled him to reach a cross-beam above, and with the agility of a seaman he had soon contrived to gain the sloping skylight in the roof.

It was with emotions of a new and indefinable nature that she now saw before her, for the first time, the youthful and engaging form of Alfred Howard. Though the treatment he had experienced had somewhat marred the effect of his fine open countenance—for the force of the blow given him on his capture had still left in a broad black mark across the forehead, proofs of the severity of the contusion—it had not destroyed the indications of his disposition. Mary would have felt pleased at being the means of saving one far less prepossessing, but it was with a blushing rapture that she now saw a handsome stranger take her hand warmly within his own, and hail her as his deliverer.

Alfred was, likewise, not unsusceptible of the surprise that awaited him. He had pictured to himself the friendly interposition of some well-meaning milkmaid that chance had brought that morning to his assistance, and was quite unprepared to find that the girl who had rendered him such an essential service

was not only one who seemed to be familiar with the cause of his detention, but who, notwithstanding the fatigue which she had undergone, was yet personally attractive, and who exhibited traces of unquestionable superiority to the station which he was at first disposed to assign her. His heart acknowledged instinctively the presence of one who was worthy of being beloved, and he involuntarily yielded to emotions that love and gratitude both united to produce.

"Your timely help was doubly fortunate, my pretty one," he exclaimed, as Mary, trembling lest they should be seen by Hawkins and her father, whom she momentarily expected, sought to draw him from the spot; "striking a chisel into the wall, I displaced a brick, and, as this fell, a canvass bag rolled out, which seemed to have been concealed in a hole behind it. It is full of silver, as you see. Since chance chooses in this manner to fling us a reward for past annoyances, it is but fair you should receive the benefit of it;" and he proffered her the money he had found.

"Not a shilling of it, sir," earnestly declined Mary; "it is your own. I am sure it must be; for it is with an intention to rob you of what you possess that they will come hither. Do not, I beg of you, tarry an instant longer. On this open ground concealment is impossible. Four miles across the pastures in that direction will bring you near to Barking; of your future course you are the best judge; but, for my sake, fly from here. If I have deserved your thanks, show that you can reward me by instantly quitting this hateful spot."

"It would seem as if you were determined to mystify me," said Alfred; "for money ought to be the last motive that should impel a hand to be raised against me, since I have not a sixpence in the world but that I earn. Beyond having a faint recollection of a struggle on the river, and a smart blow that came soon afterwards, I knew nothing of the way in which I was brought here, until a churlish old uncle of mine, and a big bully that accompanied him, but whose face I could not see in the twilight, enlightened me a little, and made me give up my boxes to them under a threat of starving me into compliance. It may be, however, as you say," he added, thoughtfully; "the miserly wretch may want to rid himself of one that he thinks likely to become an incumbrance to him. Now I have got my arms at liberty, however, they shall find I will not tamely submit to hard blows without returning them with interest."

"Think not of defending yourself now," urged Mary, imploringly; "but away at once, and since the means of flight have been so happily placed within your power, come not again within your uncle's reach. See," she cried, fixing her eyes intently upon a small speck that now appeared on the bend of the river, which was glimmering in the morning sunlight; "from this hillock you may perceive their boat turning round the point. Let me not again have to urge my only request."

"Well, then, my fair deliverer," cried Howard; "you must be my guide as you have been my guardian. I will exert myself to find the real owner of the money that I have so luckily stumbled over; and, in the meantime, only borrow enough to meet the emergency of the moment. But your own safety must be looked to—this is no place for a young woman to be in alone at such an hour as this. Do you reside near here?"

"I live close to Radcliffe Highway," responded Mary, casting down her eyes as she saw the gaze of her companion inquisitively fixed upon them, "but ask me nothing more. Accident enabled me to be the humble means of saving you, perhaps, from a violent death, and the very circumstances that gave me power to do this compel me to be silent respecting my name and home. Our paths now lie in different directions, and I must here bid you farewell."

"Stay, one moment; tell me your Christian name, that I may cherish some association of the scene that has brought us so strangely together, and I will inquire no farther?"

"Mary," was the faltering response, as she reluctantly drew away the hand that he clasped so ardently in his own.

"Then, Mary," exclaimed Howard, with accents of endearing tenderness, "since by that name only you wish henceforth to be remembered, my heart tells me that we shall meet again—meet, too, under happier circumstances than the present; but, before we part, accept this silver cross; it was given me abroad by the father of a child that I had saved from drowning. Take this from me, and with it the grateful recollections of Alfred Howard."

As this was said, he drew the trinket from his neck, to which it had been suspended by a piece of ribbon, and placed it in her hand, at the same time conveying the other respectfully to his lips. Another moment, and she saw him speeding through the marshes towards a little undulation, on which were clustered a few trees, that might have served as a landmark, and past which she had instructed him to go. As he arrived here, he turned round, waved an adieu to her with the handkerchief that he had untwisted from his neck, and she saw him no more.

As for Mary, footsore and exhausted with the journey she had undertaken, it was with no little pleasure that she reached again her own door. On her road home she had been fortunately able to obtain a conveyance that brought her back nearly all the way in a covered van, which had been moving some furniture into the country on the preceding night. The driver happened to know her, as he lived in the same street as the bird-fancier; and as she told him that she had accompanied her father to the fields that morning, he saw nothing in her position or jaded appearance to occasion surprise. Feigning that she had lost the key, and offering the same explanation to the old shoemaker, her opposite neighbour, who had just taken down the shutters of his shop, the worthy cordwainer quickly procured for her another from a marine-store in the vicinity; and with this she obtained an entrance. As the key of the inner staircase, she perceived, had been left in the lock, there was no difficulty in reaching her own apartment; and overcome by great bodily fatigue and the reaction of the spirits from the exciting adventure gone through, Mary sank upon the bed with a variety of thoughts floating through her mind, from which the image of Alfred Howard was at least not absent. Nature, however, at last asserted its sway, and she fell into a profound and refreshing slumber.

CHAPTER X.

THE MURDER IN THE MARSHES.

We have little occasion to remind the reader who has extended his summer steam-boat excursions down the river below Woolwich, that for some distance along the coast on the Essex side there is little to be seen beyond a wearisome succession of flat swampy pastures, the shelving banks of which are of a soft

clayey soil, thinly crowned with the commonest vegetation.

At intervals the slope is indented with a small creek, filled either by the heavy rains that drain through the trenches cut deep into the level, or receiving the overflowings of the tide, that, breaking beyond its boundary, penetrate the land far into the interior.

The outlet of a stream tributary to the Thames will be noticed here and there, by a broader indentation, and pointed out by some broken stump of an old tree, or a post half submerged, and marking the parish boundary. Here may be seen a solitary gull occasionally hovering over the desolate waste, and seeming in its circling flight to be bewildered by a region which it has flown into without intending; and among the wide-leaved flags and reedy tufts that grow about the banks, a water-rat may be heard to plunge and grovel in the holes sunk in the margin of the shallow water; but other sign of life or animation will be rarely met with.

It was by one of these creeks that Randall and Hawkins now brought up their boat, and drawing it so closely beneath an overhanging clump of rushes that it was entirely concealed from view, they sprang ashore, and proceeded onward, trampling down the high wet grass as they went, in the direction they had taken on the preceding expedition to the same locality.

"Now," cried Hawkins, as they pursued their way towards the barn, "you will remember what I have said, Mr. Randall. Half of all I possess is yours, so that you rid me of the interloper that has again thrust himself into my path. Stop not to question him more than you can avoid, for he is artful—very artful, Mr. Randall, and will soon see the drift of our inquiries."

"Leave me to manage the business," rejoined the bird-fancier, with a surly nod, as he plodded on through the heavy clay; "if the youngster turns rusty, I shall soon find a way to settle him as effectually as on the other occasion, when we first ran foul of one another."

"It is a lonely spot to fix upon, is it not, Mr. Randall?" observed the miser, as with a grim and sullen satisfaction he contemplated the desolate waste that spread around them. "Let a man call for help ever so loud, there would be none to hear—none to

help him. We may already make sure of the money still being our own—of the rents that we shall have to receive, and that we shall have henceforth to divide between us."

"Humph!" growled Randall; "for the matter of that, the lad might live, if his right to the property is as much unknown to him now as ever, and if you take better care of these papers for the future. Let him away to the sea once more, and there are a hundred chances to one in our favour against his turning up again."

"But we had better make sure of that now, Mr. Randall," returned the other, striving to keep pace with the rapid strides of his companion; "we may never again have so excellent an opportunity. When once we know that he is dead we may feel ourselves secure, but not till then—not till then."

"And forget not that the money is to be paid directly the deed is done," reminded the bird-fancier. "If you attempt to play me false in this matter, to trick me out of the fair half I was promised, you shall find I have a pretty quick way of bringing these accounts to a reckoning. So if you mean to swindle me after all, and value your own safety, you and I had better part company at once."

"You are too severe upon me, you are indeed," remonstrated Hawkins, in a whining, hypocritical tone. "You know, my good friend, that I have concealed in that building a great amount of money, more even than you would be entitled to from the conditions we have made, and you know that I could not withhold it from one who has been so clever in finding out one hoard of mine already."

"Which, of course, you have not been fool enough to contribute to, since I came upon the track of it," added Randall; "and as for the rest, I might knock the whole place to the ground before I came upon the right spot. However, if you shirk out of the bargain at the last moment, mind, I give you fair warning, the less your miserable old body comes within reach of my grasp the better."

As Randall quickened his pace towards the hovel that was now only a few yards before them, he saw not the scowl of hatred that passed like a dark cloud over the face of the miser, who, following closely upon his tread, seemed with difficulty to prevent himself from uttering aloud the sinister wishes of his heart. But as the building was approached, the former cold and saturnine expression of his countenance returned, and he whispered to the bird-fancier, in a fawning tone:

"Now, my dear friend, remove the fastenings carefully; one blow from your strong hand, good Jacob, and then——"

The remainder of the sentence was lost in a sudden exclamation of surprise from Randall, who, having taken the key from Hawkins, had thrown open the door of the barn, and found the place empty; whilst the chisel struck into the old brick wall, and the skylight broken through above, palpably proclaimed the mode of flight.

"The game's up!" he exclaimed, venting his astonishment and disappointment in a succession of fearful oaths; "the bird has flown."

"Gone!" ejaculated Hawkins, entering the building, and looking with savage fury on the proofs that were visible of the manner in which the escape had been managed; "ten thousand curses on the hand that has assisted him, for he could not have done this alone!" and the miser, grinding his teeth with ferocious energy, gave way to the wildest ebullitions of rage in the excess of his impotent passion.

"There are signs enough here of another having come to the rescue," remarked Randall, who had again crossed the threshold, and examined the traces of recent footsteps in the long wet grass. "The place is not so little frequented as you seem to imagine;" and he turned round with a sneer to Hawkins, who, having just noticed that the brick had been removed which concealed his treasure, was excited by the discovery of his loss to absolute frenzy.

"Villain! robber!" he cried, his voice choking with fury, "you have done this. You have been in the plot to cheat me. You have wormed my secret out of me; and now you have led me here to chuckle over my disappointment. Give me back my gold—give me back the money that you have stolen!" And he flung himself, in the excess of his mad passion, on the burly form of the bird-fancier.

"Fool! madman!" exclaimed Randall, with vehemence, as he thrust the miser back to arm's length; "are you crazy with the loss of a few paltry shillings, that you suppose I know any thing of the lad giving us the slip? Take your hands off, I say; or if I return a blow for this, you will repent it."

"I am ruined—my money has been stolen from me!" almost shrieked the miser, as he relaxed his hold; "but you alone knew of this; and none but you could have used me thus. Tell me what you have done with the boy, and I will forgive you; but give me back the hard savings of my life, which I have perilled body and soul to scrape together." And the wretched man, grovelling on his knees, looked up imploringly at the stern figure of the bird-fancier, who treated him with scorn and contempt.

"I tell you," he thundered forth, "I know neither what has become of the lad, nor the money that you rave so much about. But though it seems we have come here to no purpose, I am not to be done out of my dues. The bargain you made has been kept on my part, and shall be on yours. So hand me over the sum you promised, or else, now I know the whole affair, you shall find the police on your track before another day is added to your miserable existence."

"No, not a shilling more," gasped the miser, as, clinging to the spot where his hoard had been broken open, he found the loss not so great as he had supposed; "not a shilling of this belongs to you. I have a right to all—it is mine."

"Then, if you force me to pay myself," continued Randall, "I shall hesitate no longer;" and striding across to the place where the old man stood, eagerly examining the amount that he had drawn from the aperture in the wall, he snatched two of the canvass bags from the ground, and thrust them into his vest, making, at the same time, a grasp at the remainder.

"Help! thieves! they are robbing me!" screamed, rather than shouted, the old man, as with eager tenacity he clutched at the last one Randall had secured, and which, torn in the struggle, now let fall a quantity of silver coin upon the floor. "Help! robbery! help!"

"Croak away, my old raven," cried the other, heedless of the glance of vindictive fury that Hawkins directed towards him; "you forget your own words—it is a lonely spot to fix upon—a man might call for help ever so loud, and there would be none to hear or help him."

"Fiend, would you drive me mad!" shrieked the miser, as, with his frame trembling under the influence of strong passion, he saw the bird-fancier coolly possessing himself of the scattered coin.

"Wait till I have gathered up the whole of what

belongs to me, and you may get an answer," retnrned Randall with aggravating calmness.

Irritated by the disappointment he had sustained, and stnng into frenzy by the sight of the money thus unceremoniously appropriated, the old man paused nntil Randall had again assumed a stooping position, and then drawing a keen clasp-knife from his pocket, he sprang upon him with the ferocity of a tiger, and, driving the blade furiously down, he wonld have stabbed him in the neck, had not the other, rising at the moment, diverted the aim, and caused his assailant to thrust the weapon harmlessly into the stont neckerchief that was fortunately worn by the bird-fancier.

The force with which the blow had been delivered, and the appearance of the knife, still clutched vindictively in his hand, at once betrayed the miser's action and its intention. Paralysed by the failnre of his attempt, the old man, rooted to the spot, hardly moved under the powerful grasp by which Randall now held his throat; bnt the fierce hatred which his face exhibited when he struck the blow still remained its dominant expression. By degrees Randall tightened his hold, and, as he grew more exasperated in the terrible revenge he was taking, the fearful oaths uttered in his passion came faster and more numerous. At last, with one tremendous asseveration, he cast the miser from him, and then, with a hollow sound, he saw the form he had released fall heavily back upon the floor, and he fonnd that the muscnlar grip with which he had seized him had proved the grasp of death.

As the reflections arising from the crime he had committed in the excess of his angry retribution, and the thought of the necessary concealment that must follow, presented themselves to his mind, a cold shudder passed like an icy thrill through his frame, and with an anxious movement he bent down beside the inanimate form that, with its lineaments fixed and rigid, seemed to stare fiercely and reproachfully upon him.

The violent paroxysm of fury into which he had worked himself, and the involuntary strangulation produced by the firm hold of his exasperated antagonist, had alike contributed to cause the violent death of the miser; but Randall regarded himself as alone being guilty, and like the sudden withdrawal of a curtain behind which the most appalling spectres have been concealed, the bird-fancier now felt himself a murderer, and became haunted by the most fearful images of horror, associated with the presence of the frightful corpse that lay stretched before him.

All his exertions to bring back the spark of life to the form of helpless clay that was extended at his feet had been bestowed in vain; and as he listened for the breathing that might indicate some sign of lingering existence yet perceptible, he heard the pulsations of his own heart become distinctly audible, whilst no token of animation was to be perceived in the cold stark figure that, crouched in the same position where it fell, had already revealed, in the lurid blackness that overspread the face, nnerring symptoms of certain dissolution.

With a conviction that the body must be immediately removed, lest a chance straggler in that locality should become aware of the ccenrrence, and should challenge him as the murderer, Randall rapidly glanced at the premises to see the best means they afforded of disposing of the dead; the discovery of a loose plank in the flooring suggested that beneath the hovel he might obtain the convenience he sought. Ripping open the boards, he found to his surprise and gratification that a deep excavation had been before wrought underneath the building in a way which proved it had manifestly formed a portion of the miser's cunning scheme to hide the wealth he had amassed from the eye of his fellow creatures. Further examination brought to light a small box, completely filled with gold; and now satisfied that he had lighted on the secret hoard where Hawkins had buried the riches he had so nefariously acquired, he distributed the money he took from this source carefully abont his person, and dragged the form of the miser to the same spot.

About half an hour's labour enabled him to effectually conceal the body of Hawkins, and efface every sign of the boards having been so recently disturbed. Having thus deposited the body in the same place where the miser had secreted the gold that formed the object of his constant worship, he quitted the barn, and turned towards the creek by which his boat was moored.

Away from the scene in which this sudden and unexpected event had taken place, his confidence retnrned. For Hawkins he felt no regret. His own life had been attempted; and with the sophistry which is always at hand to blunt the keen reproaches of conscience, he began to regard what he had done as almost a jnstifiable act of self-defence. The money he had obtained he resolved to keep for the real inheritor, when he should have the opportunity of effecting the restoration. He would only employ, in the meantime, snfficient to satisfy his immediate wants, and aid him in procuring restitution for the lost heir. But despite these whisperings of a better monitor, he could not help reckoning the chances that the money would ever be applied for; and having satisfactorily arranged in his own mind that the chances were very small indeed, he turned aside from the stairs at Limehouse, and began to drink deeply at the first tavern he encountered, to drown the recurrence of more unpleasant reflections that were fast forcing themselves npon him.

Too deeply intoxicated by the time he reached home to be surprised at the appearance of his daughter at liberty, and with his thoughts too much engrossed by other matters to heed the inquiries which Mary addressed to him, he sent out for more brandy, and then sank into a state of stupor that was only relieved by the sleep which it indnced. Shunning all questions as to the manner in which he had obtained the money he had in his possession, he would rally from one drunken fit only to drink himself to lethargy again; and the remonstrances of his daughter were met by a torrent of abuse that was the more wounding to her feelings since she felt it to be wholly nnmerited.

Thus passed several days, during which Randall scarcely knew a moment's sobriety. Under the maddening infinence of the ardent spirits that were now consumed by him in enormous quantities, he would boast of having made a lncky hit that would make him a rich man for life; but all the subtle contrivances employed by his companions to draw from him the source whence he had derived the fnnds for these excesses failed of attaining their object. A look or word that savoured of curiosity upon this point would seal his lips, and he would become moody and taciturn. So long as his comrades shared in the pot-house revels he provided, they cared not indeed to seek much further. Whether he came by it honestly or not was no business that troubled them, and his presence at the tavern was too profitable to the landlord not to

be welcomed and encouraged. Some said Jacob had had a legacy left him; others that he had been well paid for some work that he had undertaken; but all agreed that he was employing his cash wisely when he was spending it among themselves. And so the glass went merrily round, and Randall was sent staggering home night after night, lauded as a jovial fellow by his boon associates, and finding his purse each day becoming more impoverished by the expenses in which he indulged.

Satisfied that her father had been prevented from carrying into execution the design she had overheard, and knowing that, although his business was precarious, he had frequently brought home before, from his contraband transactions, a considerable sum, Mary thought less of the amount that he was spending than the manner in which it was expended. In vain she sought to wean him from his prevailing vice. Harsh words and violent blows were her recompense for the tender care with which she strove to make him happy in his home; and in the heat of his intemperance he once struck her to the ground. From that hour she felt herself absolved from filial duty; and feeling that the place had ceased to be a home for her, she silently resolved to act upon an intention that had been gradually forming in her mind.

The prospect of happiness in the dwelling that she occupied Mary saw was daily becoming more remote. The increasing brutality of her father, and the vicious influences that surrounded her, excited an earnest wish to escape from their contamination; and the opportunity for acting upon this desire soon occurred.

One evening, when the ill-usage she had received from her father had been more than usually severe, the bird-fancier, who had been sleeping off his drunkenness throughout the day, rose to rejoin his tavern companions; and in answer to her applications for money, threw down a sovereign, with an intimation that he should not return till midnight. Mary watched him leave with tearful eyes, as she rose from the table where she had been seated, weeping bitterly; and then feeling that the time had arrived for action, she prepared for her own departure. Her arrangements, that had been commenced in anticipation the day beforehand, were soon completed. She had taken a lodging in the Borough at the house of a person whom she knew as a respectable tradeswoman; and with the hope of soon finding some employment by which she could support herself, she resolved to there fix her temporary abode, until such an opportunity occurred. A small box, containing a few requisites of wearing apparel, was all that she took with her, and this was conveyed to the nearest cab-stand by the son of the shoemaker, who had often rendered her such trifling services before. In return for his aid Mary presented him with her own favourite canary, the last of the stock that remained; for the rest of the birds had all been sold, and, in consequence of Randall's indifference to his business, their places had not been re-filled by others. Conscious of the bold nature of the step she had determined on, and terrified by every footstep lest it should be that of her father, Mary crossed the threshold of the old dwelling with a heavy heart; and the vehicle had no sooner conveyed her to her new home, where all was strange and unfamiliar, than the contrast was brought vividly before her, and the perils of the great world into which she had thrown herself seemed to mass themselves in one appalling aggregate before her. That night the pillow of the bird-fancier's daughter was bedewed with heart-wrung tears.

CHAPTER XI.

THE OPERA-DANCER.

It was about noon on the day following that when the brilliant *début* of the new *danseuse* at the Opera took place, and the heroine of the preceding night's triumph was reclining negligently on a couch in a handsomely-appointed drawing-room that formed a portion of the magnificent suite of apartments she occupied in King Street, St. James's.

Mademoiselle Celestine—for we must introduce her under that name by which she attained her professional popularity—was one of those charming, sylph-like creatures that immediately seize upon the admiration of the beholder. Born in Italy, educated in France, and well acquainted with the English, from the society in which she had mixed abroad, it seemed as if she had become unconsciously endowed with the characteristics distinguishing those different nations. She exhibited the passionate ardour of the first, the refined graces of the second, and the purity of sentiment of the third; and as, with nearly equal fluency, she conversed also in English, French, and Italian, it was as though her knowledge of the three languages had insensibly led her to acquire the manners of those by whom they were spoken. Her features were well formed, extremely regular, and impressed with that fascinating glow of youthful enthusiasm that gave a charm to the entire countenance, and indicated the intense love with which she could devote herself to her profession in the pursuit of fame.

The complexion was clear and exquisitely transparent; and above a forehead of smooth and ample proportion, her dark brown hair was seen flowing back in glossy tresses over her finely-turned neck and shoulders. Her eyes were full and voluptuously expressive, fringed by long silky lashes, and overarched with brows of faultless curvature. Her lips were of that rich deep colour that contrasted so finely with the rows of pearly teeth half-disclosed between them, and her ears were delicately small and handsome. Reclining on the couch, the rounded contour of her limbs was seen to full advantage, and the figure thus extended was one that an artist would have delighted to depict, or a sculptor to embody in the perpetuity of marble.

The superior furniture and decorative appointments that surrounded her were of that elegant and tasteful kind that gave to the room an appearance of sumptuous refinement and luxurious comfort; and in numerous china vases, suitable for their display, flowers of the most beautiful and costly description were arranged in ornamental bouquets about the place, so that wherever the eye of the fair lounger turned, it reposed upon the choicest images of floral loveliness.

In the recess formed by the projection of the bay curved window was also a flower-stand, crowned by the most fragrant plants, in full blossom, and exhaling a delicious odour that completely penetrated the apartment; and in the midst of these were globes of gold and silver fish, that, glancing in the sunshine, as the bright rays gleamed upon their shining scales, gave a pleasing animation to the picture, at the same time that the pellucid element in which they disported imparted agreeable sensations of refrigerating coolness.

The window was just raised to admit the air, and a blind drawn slightly down softened the strong light of a summer noon to a mellow radiance that was peculiarly adapted to set off the objects in the room to the greatest advantage. The sumptuous breakfast ser-

vice was still left unremoved upon the table, and it was evident that morning repast had only been recently concluded.

The young mistress of these signs of wealthy indulgence, and who had thus, in the very heart of the metropolis, contrived to encircle herself with the associations of the country, was apparently yet suffering from the languor and depressing lassitude of the system, induced by the mental and physical excitement she had experienced, and the reaction of a night that had inaugurated a career which flatterers had already whispered was one of an unparalleled brilliancy of promise. This was the cause of her present indolent position; and to the same source the unwonted pallor of her cheek, and the dimmed brilliancy of her eye, were likewise to be attributed.

As her form, gracefully recumbent, was attired in a light morning robe, and her hair, unbound, was clustering in careless tresses over her neck and shoulders, there seemed a certain fascinating attraction about her, the origin of which it would have been difficult to have resolved into any definite charm.

Her features now wore an expression of pensive melancholy that gave them a peculiar kind of interest, irrespective of their inherent beauty; and as her meditations were apparently of a sombre nature, the shade of earnest thought that was upon her brow was the more remarkable from the light and frivolous manner that is so usually associated with the vocation she followed.

Whatever these reflections were, they were now interrupted by the entrance of the servant, who announced that Madame Romani was in waiting to learn if the debutante was yet visible. An intimation in the affirmative was conveyed in return, and slightly altering her position on the couch, but yet not rising from it, the young opera-dancer prepared to receive her visitor.

Madame Romani, the prima-donna of the Opera, was a fine, commanding woman, who, as she approached the apartment, exhibited the dignified demeanour of one who was thoroughly conscious of the prominent place she held in her profession, and was determined to maintain her station by a manner calculated to inspire deference and respect. This assumption of austerity was, however, abandoned in the society of her most intimate friends; and then, the restraint being thrown off, her real disposition was found to be most agreeable and conciliatory, and the innate warmth of her heart made itself manifest in innumerable kind attentions. On this occasion she appeared to have bestowed more than ordinary care upon her toilette. Her dress, consisting of a costly robe of plum-coloured satin, fitted closely up to her throat, and displayed her majestic figure to the fullest advantage, whilst a rich mantle drooped gracefully from her shoulders, and her head, shaped as though the Grecian statue of Diana had served for the model, was surmounted by a small plume of feathers that, in their waving, seemed to simulate the elegant undulation that characterised her movements.

When the door had closed, and the vocalist and the danseuse were left together, the former approached the recumbent beauty, who smilingly acknowledged her first salutation, and, taking her kindly by the hand, exclaimed in a voice strongly marked by the foreign accent:

"My dear Celestine, how sad you appear, my child; you that I had expected to have found this morning elated with the triumph you have gained. I was on my way to pay a morning visit to a nobleman, a friend of mine, who is one of my most generous patrons, and I could not resist the pleasure of calling upon you, first for the purpose of complimenting you on your *début*, and then with the view of soliciting your company on the occasion."

"Still as ever, my dear Romani, the foremost to breathe encouragement; the first to point the way to win applause, and the first to congratulate me when that applause is gained," responded the young girl, warmly, and returning a grateful pressure to the hand that clasped her own; "oh! that all were like yourself! how free would be our vocation from the bane of professional jealousy!"

"But we, who are not thus affected, can understand each other's sympathies," rejoined the prima-donna, significantly; "we are competitors, not rivals, in our emulation, and we may, therefore, preserve our friendship unimpaired by these wretched whisperings of envy. Having devoted ourselves to separate branches of the sister arts, we have each a different sphere for action; and it would be hard indeed if, in our mutual flight towards the goal of our ambition, our aspiring wings should jostle on the way. Last night I gloried in your success as much as if it had been my own."

"You were present, then?" inquired Celestine, mournfully.

"Present!" echoed the fair vocalist. "Think you I could have been elsewhere on such an occasion as that, and within the reach of seeing you? No, it was a delight that I could not deny myself. Although we met not at rehearsal, you were never absent from my thoughts from the moment that I heard of the arrangements for your appearance being satisfactorily concluded; and though I abstained from greeting you when the opera was over, lest it might flurry you in the moment of your anxiety, I had no sooner witnessed the triumphant termination of the ballet, than I hastened to the manager, complimented him on his acquisition, and ascertaining where you had taken up your residence, I resolved to be your first visitor and renew our old acquaintance, that had so auspiciously commenced abroad."

"And to none other but yourself, Romani, the kind-hearted friend of my youth, should I have been at home," added the danseuse; "but to you, who possess the key of my heart, it would be but churlish usage to deny myself at any time. Your visits are ever welcome."

"Now that your celebrity has become so universally recognised, now that your well-merited fame has been so brilliantly acknowledged," resumed the prima-donna, with a look of piquant archness, "I am afraid that my intimacy with you will be suspected of being less disinterested than before. Once it was my place to be the patroness; now the scale of fortune is turning, and I shall have to seek perhaps favours from yourself."

"I could hardly wish a greater pleasure than to grant them as liberally and readily as you have granted mine," answered Celestine; "but seriously now, have I failed to do credit to your kind recommendation?"

"Failed!" exclaimed the vocalist; "never was a triumph more genuine, more deserved. In these eloquent eulogiums passed upon your performance by the critics, do you not feel that you have already been elevated to the summit of your ambition? Are not these laudations of the journalists sufficient to gratify the most exorbitant desire for praise?" and as these words were spoken Madame Romani playfully referred

to the morning papers, which were partly unfolded on the breakfast-table.

"Oh! I am tired of hearing of my own renown," sighed the dancer pettishly; "the thrill of ecstasy that I used to feel when the acclamations of the audience rang upon my ear has long since lost its charm. I should be happier—far happier, were I again enjoying the peaceful obscurity of my early life."

"Then you reproach me for having drawn you from its retirement?"

"That would be to avow an ingratitude that I cannot believe myself guilty of," quickly rejoined Celestine with animation. "Was it not you who brought the poor orphan from the humble village inn, and raised her to the proud position of being your companion—you, the empress of the world of song, that all Italy acknowledged?"

"And has not my reward been far greater than my trifling act of kindness deserved?" said the other. "When, three miles from Naples, we stopped in our travelling carriage at that little hostelry by the roadside, and found a young girl, no more than eight years old, weeping bitterly at the harsh words that the landlord was cruelly inflicting upon her, it was not generosity, but justice, that induced us to interpose and rescue that shrinking child from the power of such a ferocious ruffian as the fellow appeared to be."

"Oh! how well I remember that memorable day!" exclaimed Celestine, her eyes glistening with tears as she recalled that painful passage in her early life. "Never shall I forget with what interest you viewed me when you heard that I was an orphan—that I had never known my parents—and that the man who had brought me to that tavern was a Neapolitan beggar, who had torn me away from the asylum where I had been placed, and was making my unhappy condition the means by which he contrived to levy contributions from the humane. I can still hear the soft melody of your voice, as you spoke to the surly host concerning me; I can again recall the tenderness of your manner, when, learning that I had been abandoned, you flung your arms lovingly around me; and I can feel once more the joyous emotion with which I heard you say henceforth you would protect me, and that I should be your adopted sister."

"Ah! Celestine, I was then a foolish, flighty girl myself," cried the songstress, dashing away a tear from her cheek, as she surrendered herself to the recollections that her *protegé* had aroused; "I was then two-and-twenty, just married, and in the second month of our prolonged honeymoon. We were on our way, I remember, from Naples to Florence. The horses stopped at the tavern whilst we exchanged postilions. The host was alternately beating and scolding a child that had been left by a strolling mendicant, and on inquiring the motive, we ascertained you had been left as a security for his return, and as a hostage for the payment of a debt which he had incurred. A robbery had been discovered, committed by the man who had thus fled, and on you, my poor child, the enraged landlord was venting his fury. The circumstances all present themselves again vividly to my memory. Your tears of joy, as you related your artless history, and found that I was to be your protector, seem still to be flowing down my cheek, and it was almost with a mother's fondness that I clasped you to my breast and told you that in me you should find a substitute for the parents you had lost."

"My generous patroness, how nobly you have redeemed your promise!" ejaculated Celestine, with grateful fervour; "but for you what should I have been? a degraded creature, driven perhaps by necessity to crime, and an object of universal loathing and abhorrence. To you I owe every thing, fame, fortune, and position."

"No," remonstrated the prima-donna; "with what I have said, my share in promoting your future fortune ceases. When I was left a widow, you became doubly endeared to me as a pupil and a companion. Anxious to exalt you above my rivals, I had spared no pains in educating you for the Opera; but your voice broke down in the severe trials to which I subjected it, and it was therefore only my duty to cultivate and direct that other talent you possessed, and which I knew would atone for the deficiency I had been instrumental in causing. The wonderful progress you have made in the art, the masterly expression you have thrown into the most ordinary attitudes, and the fame that you have acquired by performances with which every city in Europe is by this time familiar, may show the excellence of your tuition, but the credit of them is entirely due to yourself."

"And it is the feeling that I am utterly unworthy of the praises that have been so liberally lavished upon me," rejoined the danseuse, "that led me to regret just now that I was not again the unknown wanderer that first attracted your attention. If my real history should be known, untainted though it is with any voluntary fault of mine, I feel that I should be unable to encounter the gaze of an audience again."

"Come, Celestine," said her friend, with an encouraging smile, "if this only be the source of the despondency from which I find you suffering, there is no cause of sadness that can be more visionary. With myself, of course, the narrative is sacred, and who else could suppose the graceful artiste that last night drew from the public such a rapturous expression of delight, is the same that when a child, twelve years since, was the involuntary companion of an outcast?"

"Do not mistake me, my dear Romani," pursued the girl, as on the servant's entrance she raised herself from the couch, and ordered the luncheon-tray to be brought as a substitute for the breakfast service, which was at the same time removed; "it is not that I am altogether ashamed of my humble origin, or regardless of the important instruction that you have so generously afforded me. The few weeks of my novitiate in sin and poverty passed away without, I hope, leaving one stain behind; but connected with that period there seems a strange link that never recurs to me so forcibly as on the first night of my engagement in a new place."

"Why, what possible connection can there be," asked the vocalist, in a tone of amazement, "between your appearance, under such circumstances, and the event that occurred so long ago?"

"Had I not been afraid that you would have treated my story as a wild delusion, a phantasy, that had no existence save in the imagination, I should have before related to you the constant and harassing persecution under which I am suffering."

"Persecution, Celestine! Explain yourself."

"To go back to the period—four years ago—when I first came out under your auspices at Milan, you may remember that I had no sooner appeared upon the stage, than, whilst the tumultuous plaudits of a kind and compassionate audience gave me welcome to the boards, a sudden dizziness came over me, and I reeled back, almost fainting, to the side, and sank upon your shoulder for support."

"I remember, my child; it was the natural influ-

ence of stage fright acting upon an ardent and susceptible temperament. I told you so at the moment, and encouraged you to proceed, with an assurance that it would be dispelled by further practice, and that I had myself suffered from the same cause under similar circumstances."

"The cause was not that which you surmised," continued the opera-dancer; "would that it had been! for then I should not have dreaded its recurrence, as I do now. At this moment I feel the horror of the spell that was upon me."

"The spell! You alarm me. To what do you refer?"

"I had nerved myself for the trying ordeal through which I had to pass. Completely absorbed in the character I was about to portray, I should have felt not the fearful timidity of a debutante, even though conscious that years of future misery or happiness might depend upon the failure or success of that single instant. I threw my utmost energy into the first impulse with which I bounded on the stage, and, full of the excitement of the scene and the illusion attending it, I felt my heart glow with the acclamations that followed."

"It was truly a brilliant reception," interrupted the vocalist; "proceed."

"I had turned to acknowledge the applause," resumed the young danseuse, her voice faltering with emotion as she approached the more exciting part of her narrative, "when amidst the sea of heads that seemed to float around me, I saw one face emerge from the cloudy indistinctness of the rest, and turn visibly towards mine. In a moment I became speechless, my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, and all power of motion seemed to have fled. My eyes were fixed upon that glare of snake-like fascination that had enthralled me, and I read in that glance a look of fearful hatred that made my veins freeze as I followed it with an instinctive terror."

"The mere trick played by the imagination of a novice," said Madame Romani, as she forced a smile at the recital, although the cheek of Celestine, paling under the remembrance of the event, still betrayed evident signs of the reality of her alarm.

"Such was the idea I fancied you would entertain," she continued; "and, for that reason, I remained silent respecting it. Indeed, I began almost to consider myself that it arose from the same source, particularly as, during the remainder of the evening, I saw it not again, and, for several succeeding nights, I enjoyed a similar immunity from its presence. But directly I made my *début* in a new character, the cause of my fright returned; and, from that time, throughout all the great continental capitals where I have performed, I have never ceased to be persecuted by this remarkable apparition."

"Psha, Celestine!-you are too easily terrified by what, after all, may be resolved into the effects of either chance or imagination," responded the prima-donna. Here have I been intently listening to a story that I anticipated would at least have something supernatural to turn upon, and now I find that there is not even a supposed ghost about it, but only a look to exciting terror, and which, after all, may be not directed to yourself. You have been dreaming of the 'Evil Eye,' until you fancied that you had become the victim of it."

"Ah," sighed Celestine, "I was prepared for your ridicule of what you think my foolish fears, but you have not yet heard all."

"Indeed!" cried the other, in a bantering tone. "Is there, then, a delightful discovery to be made in the sequel? And pray what remarkable individual, after all, turned out to be the hero of this adventure?"

"I see," said Celestine, with a reproachful appeal to her companion, "that you are not at present disposed to listen to my story with that serious attention which, to me, it seems to deserve."

"Forgive me, child," apologised Madame Romani; "I had hoped to rally you out of a melancholy that seemed to me so strangely disproportioned to its cause. But let me hear the remainder, and I promise you I will then deliver my opinion with due solemnity."

Celestine resumed:—

"I have told you that at Milan, Naples, Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and, in short, wherever I have yet appeared, this horrible phantasm has been the constant attendant upon my most brilliant successes; and so accustomed was I to anticipate its presence, that at last I began involuntarily to seek out the face from the rest, and confront it directly on my first entrance. Strange as it may appear, by this method I found the terror it occasioned in me decrease, and I was able to trace distinctly the lineaments of that countenance that, haunting me so closely and continually, had appeared at first to possess a more than natural power of riveting my gaze. It was the face of an Italian, whose dark penetrating eyes were rendered additionally noticeable by the black massive eyebrows by which they were overhung. The expression was frightfully vindictive; but as it was associated with features that I had either never known or could not recognise, the only feeling I began to experience was one of annoyance that the man should purposely adopt a position that could not fail to catch my observation, and that he should apparently so tenaciously follow on my route wherever my engagements were formed."

"An enthusiastic admirer of yours, of course," suggested the listener."

"You shall judge by what has followed," murmured the danseuse. "Last evening, as I was waiting at the wing, listening for the change of music to take place that was to be my signal for entrance, I thought of the usual companion of my *début*, and hoped that, as I had left the continent, I should escape his observation. The moment I appeared, I was convinced of my error. Without daring to risk the look that should set at rest my doubts, I felt those fiery orbs were still intent upon me. I hazarded one glance at random, and there, as usual, in the only prominent position which the stalls afforded, was my relentless persecutor fixing his unswerving eyes upon my own."

"Still the freak of an impassioned admirer," observed the vocalist, "who hopes, by continually accustoming you to the sight of his disagreeable physiognomy, to make you at last believe that there is nothing so very repulsive about it after all."

"Take this and judge," said Celestine, as she crossed the room, unlocked a small portfolio that was on the side table, and handed to her friend a folded slip of letter-paper, which Madame Romani instantly opened for perusal.

"How did you become possessed of this?" she inquired, as soon as the contents were read.

"It was thrown through the carriage window into my lap as I left the theatre last evening," replied Celestine, "and in the crowd that awaited my departure, I am convinced that I caught sight of the now too familiar countenance of the Italian."

"Let me see it once more," said Madame Romani; "it has been hastily written in pencil, and has at least the negative merit of being concise and to the

purpose; but the threat it conveys is by no means so intelligible or pleasing;" and she read along the subjoined lines:—

"To Mdlle. Celestine.

"Three motives generally prompt a man to pursue a woman in the way that I have followed you—love, money, and revenge. I am not young enough to feel the first, and not needy enough to require the second; but the third is an object nearest to my heart, and one I have sworn to see accomplished. This evening you wore a white rose in your hair; if, on Thursday evening, there is a red one in its place, I shall know that you are a true child of Italy, and that you have the courage to meet one who will be, according to your determination,

"Your Friend or Enemy."

"Now, Celestine, I can truly discern the reason of your agitation," resumed Madame Romani, as she concluded the missive; "and no longer do I wonder at the sorrowful gloom that overtakes you when your success has been the greatest and your praise is heard the loudest. Yes, now, my child, I can understand the wish you expressed to be again happy in obscurity; and deeply do I sympathise with the feeling that called it forth; for I see you dread lest this unknown individual should know the secret of your birth, and publish those facts to the world, which, should they be of that nature which you have sometimes fancied that they were, you might naturally desire to plunge for ever in oblivion."

"You have rightly interpreted my griefs," responded Celestine; "it is this that now renders me unhappy; it is this that, when I should feel the joyous ecstasy that ought to attend the attainment of the celebrity to which I have so ardently aspired, depresses me with a sadness that nothing can relieve. In solitude I find my only solace. Am I not right to call this persecution?" and the beautiful opera-dancer, so strangely menaced, fell upon the neck of the friendly votaress of the sister art, and burst into a flood of tears.

"Come, Celestine," interrupted the prima-donna; "let us encounter this threatening evil boldly. At present we have no reason to regard this anonymous note as sent with any other motive than that of trifling with your timidity. What revenge can this be he speaks of? why, if it come from the person you suppose, should he have delayed communicating with you till now, and what object can the interview he proposes gain? No, my dear child, do not give way to these idle apprehensions. Should it be, as I cannot help suspecting, the foolish invention of some intriguing trifler, who has shot a shaft at random, and knows not how deeply it has struck into the heart it wounded, you will laugh at these groundless fears."

"Perhaps so," sighed the girl doubtfully; "but what would you suggest?"

"For the mere sake of curiosity, gratify the whim of your unknown correspondent, and place a red rose in your hair. If he should then write and fix an appointment, I will accompany you; and should there be a shadow of danger likely to accompany the interview, arrangements shall be made not only to bear you harmless upon this occasion, but to prevent the same annoyances for the future."

"My kind adviser, it shall be as you propose. I will adopt the directions you have given, although——" and Celestine again sighed mournfully.

"Now," cried her friend, changing her manner to a buoyant playfulness, and adopting a rallying tone, "if you presume to allow that most unbecoming shade of pensiveness to dwell upon your features for another instant, I shall positively, Celestine, withdraw all the promises I have made. There, that is more like yourself," she added, as a faint smile wreathed the beautiful lips of the opera-dancer. "And now, having entirely forgotten, for the present, all thoughts of this most pertinacious intruder of yours, you must reward me for my excellent qualities as a patient listener."

"How?"

"By rendering me a little favour in return."

"Can you doubt my acquiescence?"

"Then, whilst I pay a suitable compliment to the very excellent luncheon you have provided, do you conclude your toilette, and prepare to accompany me."

"To accompany you?" repeated Celestine, yielding to the contagious cheerfulness of her lively visitor; "I had fully resolved to remain in my hermitage the entire day, and devote myself to study."

"And with the sun shining so brightly?" pleaded the other; "why it is positive sacrilege against nature. Even your flowers, with which, I see, in memory of old predilections, you have environed yourself, are but a poor substitute for the magnificent pleasure-grounds to which I am about to introduce you?"

"Whither, then, are we going?"

"Since the question is very properly in the plural, you shall not be kept an instant in suspense. We are about to visit the residence of Lord Walsingham at Fulham."

"But, my dear Romani ——"

"My dear Celestine," interrupted her kind-hearted companion, "I will not accept of an excuse. You have promised me already, and I before told you it was partly to enjoy the pleasure of your society on my way thither that I called here first. My brougham is at the door, and now the sooner you are equipped for your expedition the better."

Finding that it was useless to contend against a persuasion so irresistible, Celestine offered no further remonstrances, and retiring to her ante-room, she reappeared in about half an hour afterwards, attired in a costume so exquisitely neat and elegant, that the loveliness of her person seemed to have acquired new fascinations from the becoming garb in which it was invested.

With some graceful compliments upon her improved good looks, Madame Romani prevailed upon her to partake of the refreshment that she had so liberally dispensed to her guest, and the two then entering the compact little vehicle belonging to the opulent songstress, they were speedily conveyed along Piccadilly towards the splendid mansion that formed the town residence of Lord Walsingham.

CHAPTER XII.

LORD WALSINGHAM.

The elegant villa belonging to Lord Walsingham was situated on the banks of the Thames, down to the very margin of which its sloping lawn extended. The house was a spacious mansion, approached from the road by a broad avenue of lime trees, and was fronted by a smoothly-shaven grass plot, encircled by a carriage sweep of considerable dimensions. The building itself was a modern structure, with little pretension to architectural taste; but the utmost convenience had been studied in its arrangements.

Although so near to the metropolis, the pleasure-grounds that were attached to the villa, and indeed

formed its principal feature, occupied a considerable space; and even the real boundary was adroitly concealed by the tact and ingenuity of the landscape gardener, who had contrived to so dispose the winding walks and umbrageous pathways, that the extent appeared greater from the art with which it had been laid out.

As it was now the height of summer, the parterres filled with the choicest flowers presented a pictnre of the most enchanting beanty, and sent forth into the air delicious perfumes, that freighted the atmosphere with their fragrance. Statues and fountains appeared in various parts of the gronnds, and through the windows that opened on to the lawn were visible long suites of elegant apartments, arranged in the most costly and splendid style, and ornamented with lavish embellishments so artistically and picturesquely disposed that the neble owner was evinced to be not only a person of wealth, but a person of taste.

The thick interlacing foliage of some fine elms and acacias screened the sight of the lower part of the mansion from the river, and thus the villa was as delightfully secluded as if it had been situated beyond the reach of a day's journey from the great Babylon, instead of being in one of the suburbs to which its mighty roar daily penetrated.

Alighting from the carriage, Celestine and Madame Romani were ushered into one of these magnificent rooms, that commanded a full view of the flower-garden, and here they were requested to wait whilst the footman departed to acquaint his lordship with their arrival.

They had not been left to themselves more than a few minutes, when, as Celestine, who was a passionate admirer of flowers, was drawing her companion's attention to some magnificent geraniums that were growing in the parterre before the window, an exclamation from Madame Romani directed her notice to two figures that were now seen to be approaching down the gravel-walk towards the place where they stood.

The persons who thus emerged into view from one of the many winding alleys that the gronnds presented, were too earnestly occupied in conversation to remark the interest with which they were being observed; for a few words from tho vocalist had in-

formed Celestine that the younger was the noble owner of the villa to which she had been introduced, and that the more mature personage, with whom he was conversing, was his friend the Earl of Winterton.

Lord Walsingham was a handsome-looking man, of about three-and-thirty, well formed, and exhibiting, besides that grace of manner and dignity of deportment naturally associated with his rank, a pleasing suavity of countenance, that at the first glance greatly predisposed a stranger in his favour. A more acute physiognomist might, however, have readily detected in the upper and lower portions of his face indications of two distinct phases of character, and these so strongly marked as to be brought out in visible antagonism. All that was noble, generous, and intellectual, could be traced in the massive forehead, the spacious width between the eyebrows, and the deep, full eyes beneath, that struck the observer with their manly earnestness of expression; but, in the outline of the mouth and chin, there were those unerring signs of a warm and sensuous temperament that considerably qualified the high opinion that would otherwise have been entertained. An enthusiastic lover of pleasure, a constant votary of those delights that yield but a short and transitory enjoyment, Lord Walsingham was a type of that very numerous class among the aristocracy who become voluptuaries through idleness as well as from inclination, and who, with strong passions and the means to gratify them, fail to exercise the restraint of self-control.

Reason was ever warring with temptation, and the fascinations held forth by the latter led him continually astray into those flowery labyrinths where extrication becomes more difficult as the nature of the enchantment becomes more familiar. Unfettered by matrimonial ties, he had hitherto chiefly sought amusement in female society, and it was through the valued privilege he enjoyed of obtaining access behind the scenes of the opera that he had first cultivated an intimacy with the prima-donna of the establishment.

The footman having announced their arrival, Lord Walsingham and the earl entered the apartment together; and Madame Romani, having responded to the cordial welcome that she received, instantly proceeded to introduce Celestine to the notice of her patron.

"Most delighted am I to have this unexpected pleasure accorded me," said the peer, as with eager admiration he crossed the apartment and greeted the opera-dancer with an ardent pressure of the hand; "permit me, mademoiselle, to offer my congratulations on the brilliant success that you last evening achieved. I had already heard from my friend, the Earl of Winterton, a glowing account of your charms, but I now perceive his description, so far from being exaggerated, has fallen far short of the reality before me."

"Your lordship is a sad flatterer," interposed Madame Romani, perceiving the diffident confusion under which Celestine was labouring; "from your lips the language of commendation flows so freely, that compliments from you almost lose their value."

"Still the same severe monitor as ever," rejoined the nobleman, with an assumption of mock solemnity, as he drew her on one side. "It would be but fair retaliation to allege, that since compliments are unavoidable where Madame Romani appears, the absence of novelty has led her to believe in a want of their sincerity. The Earl of Winterton must be, however, the most formidable offender, for his eulogies were those of an enthusiast. Let us give him the opportunity of exonerating himself."

The earl, who, immediately on his entrance, had been still further struck by the resemblance which a closer view had rendered more apparent, here advanced as the others retired; and in a voice that evinced the deep agitation which this accidental meeting had produced, he renewed the tribute of admiration that he had previously addressed to Lord Walsingham.

"You speak our language so finently, mademoiselle," he added, with a look of anxious interest on the features of Celestine, "that we might believe you were even a countrywoman of ours. Have you been long a resident in England?"

"Only a few months," explained Celestine, "but abroad I have been so much in the society of the English, that on my arrival here I found the acquirement by no means difficult. Indeed, with so assiduous a teacher as I had in my kind friend Madame Romani, my progress should have been more rapid than it was."

"And may I inquire to what country, then, we are so deeply indebted?" pursued the earl, in a strain of gallantry, under which he strove to veil the excitement caused by those remembrances of the past that were now rushing back upon his mind.

"Italy," was the answer, in a low soft voice; "I was born near Naples."

"And your parents?" inquired the earl, as the mention of that locality struck a responsive chord in his soul; "were they also natives of that country?"

"They died whilst I was yet a child," hesitated Celestine, her eyes filling with tears, and her face flushing with emotion; "I must beg your lordship to excuse me from further dwelling on the subject."

"It is I, mademoiselle," said the earl, with much feeling, "who should ask your pardon for inadvertently awakening griefs that are too sacred to be lightly disturbed; but I also have lost in that city one deeply endeared to me, and it was the resemblance that I traced between you that led me to be thus abrupt in my inquiries."

Celestine looked gratefully up to the nobleman whilst he spoke, and as if a communion of sentiment had that moment been established between them, she felt a profound veneration and sympathetic regard take the place of the calm indifference with which she had viewed his first approach. There was something so different in his language and manner to the flippant style of those with whom she was habituated to converse, that she felt more flattered by the respectful tone he had adopted in the few words that had been interchanged, than if he had spoken in the strain of fulsome adulation to which she was so much accustomed.

"Is she not handsome?" remarked Madame Romani, who, after a brief discourse that she had held privately with Lord Walsingham, now noticed his glance wander towards the figure of the danseuse; "was I not faithful in my report of her charms?"

"She is angelic," rejoined his lordship, with rapturous delight, as he surveyed from the short distance where he stood the fine symmetrical proportions of the opera-dancer, "and far transcends the image my fancy had pictured from your description. Did I not know the earl is to-morrow week to lead my young cousin Adeline to the altar, I should be apprehensive of the attentions that he seems to bestow upon her."

"Hush! they have ceased speaking. Let us approach," said the songstress, significantly adding, "you will remember our arrangement;" and as the colloquy, which had been continued in an undertone, thus ter-

minated, Lord Walsingham exchanged with her a glance full of meaning, and they returned to the centre of the room at the same time that the conversation that had passed between the earl and Celestine had concluded with the incident we have recorded.

During the more general topics of discussion that were now introdnced, the play of fancy and genial warmth of feeling that Celestine exhibited aided to produce in the mind of Lord Walsingham still stronger sentiments of admiration; and as he kept his eyes riveted on the lovely being that had thus infatuated him, he saw, or fancied that he saw, in the encouraging tone with which she responded to his advances, an assurance that his attentions were not unfavourably received.

The entrance of the footman with an announcement that the Earl of Winterton's carriage was in readiness hurried the departure of that nobleman, but not before he had acknowledged the interest Celestine had created, by intimating that during the brief remainder of the operatic season he should take every opportunity of witnessing her succeeding representations.

As soon as the absence of the earl freed him from a restraint he had felt to be somewhat embarrassing, the attentions of Lord Walsingham became more strongly marked. He had become enamoured of her form from the first moment they had met, and a further acquaintance was only necessary to confirm the growth of that passion which had been so suddenly but so deeply rooted in his breast. Besides the attachment with which she had inspired him, a still more powerful motive urged him at the same time to possess the fascinating being by whom he had been so completely infatuated. Pride whispered the glory of the triumph, if he could be the first to secure the victory over that youthful beauty who had emerged like a bright star upon the horizon of his existence, and who had drawn all the loungers of the opera into the train of her admirers.

Rapidly had these thoughts darted through his mind, and he determined to spare no effort to make her his own.

A wish having been expressed by Celestine to see the extent of the grounds that surrounded the mansion, Lord Walsingham begged to be allowed the privilege of becoming their escort; and they accordingly accompanied him into the garden, where the flowers, fountains, and statues, furnished an inexhaustible variety of topics for their discourse. The admiration avowed by Celestine at these proofs of his lordship's taste and judicious expenditure he heard with pleasurable satisfaction, as he hoped the congeniality of disposition thus indicated would prove the forernnner of a still closer union of sympathies.

At the extremity of one of the gravelled walks leading towards the grove of elms was an alcove, thickly interlaced with leaves, and so overspread with roses and clematis, that it seemed, in the sunlight glinting through the tender stems and fragrant blossoms, to be the very bower where the vows of love should find utterance.

"Your lordship has assuredly endeavoured, by this profusion of embellishments, to delude the senses of your visitors," cried Celestine; "were I not convinced of the real source to which I should ascribe this combination of the horticultural and the statuesque, I might readily fancy myself traversing the paths of some enchanted garden, and that this exquisite arbour formed the abode of the fairy owner."

"I am an ardent worshipper of beauty, mademoiselle," rejoined the nobleman, looking earnestly into her full and lustrous eyes; "and I devote myself with zeal to the task of circling around me those objects of loveliness which are the chief pleasures of my life. I may now, however," he added, with a respectful bow, "consider myself singularly fortunate in having my mansion graced by the presence of one beautiful image that far surpasses every other of which it can boast."

"Your lordship must find true enjoyment in thus patronising art," said Celestine, anxious to avoid acknowledging the compliment he had bestowed, by appearing not to understand it; "this is a complete picture."

"It would be a paradise to me had I one whom I loved to share with me its delights," sighed her companion, regretfully.

"And has your lordship never yet fonnd one so deserving of your regard?" said Celestine, in an inquiring tone.

"Never one to whom I could yield my heart without reserve," said Walsingham, "until——"

"When?" cried the danseuse, finding he paused, as if waiting to be questioned.

"Until I saw you," exclaimed the nobleman, seizing her hand with earnestness, and impressing on it an ardent kiss before it could be withdrawn.

"Your lordship, I am not used to this language; your conduct is too precipitate—it is not warranted by the circumstances under which we have met; it ought not to have been expected from the shortness of our acquaintance," remonstrated Celestine, striving to disengage the hand which her impassioned admirer still clasped tightly in his own.

"Hear me, Celestine," spoke Walsingham, in a low but deeply impressive voice: "our acquaintance is not so brief as you believe. I have long watched yon with the feelings of an ardent lover, though you knew it not; and it was with the hope that we should meet as we have met to day, that I last night avoided seeing you under the more deceptive influences of your profession. I love you, have loved you, and shall love you still, even though you should cruelly reject the heart I offer."

"Surely, my lord, you are not in earnest," cried the danseuse, colouring deeply at the warmth with which she was addressed, and perplexed by the unexpected avowal; "I came here as the friend of Madame Romani, who——"

"Who has kindly fulfilled her promise of introducing you to me," interrupted the patrician. "Forgive the innocent stratagem that has been the means of affording me so much happiness, and tell me that I may at least hope for some requital of an affection which has not been the less sincere for having hitherto been cherished in secret and in silence."

"Really, your lordship has taken me so much by surprise," said the lovely girl, whose charms were heightened by the blushes to which her confusion gave rise, "that I must have time to reflect upon and consider the nature of a proposal for which I was so utterly unprepared."

"And may I hope, then, that I am not indifferent to you?" appealed the nobleman, throwing the utmost fervour into his look and tone; "may I flatter myself that you will respond to a passion that has now broken through the bounds of concealment?"

"Lord Walsingham, I will be candid with you," answered Celestine, drawing up her fine figure to its full proportions, and speaking in a firm, decisive strain; "the distinguished position you occupy, and the deference to family connections which you are

compelled to show, of course forbid me to interpret your proposition otherwise than as referring to an arrangement that is too frequent between the distinct classes of society to which we belong, to excite much remark or reprehension. I have been forced too often to hear proposals—many of them less delicately made than your own—to doubt the estimate formed of our character by the world. We are presumed to be the creatures of circumstances—to be bought as a toy for the gratification of the passing hour, and then to be sold and forgotten with as little regret as a discarded equipage. We are supposed to have the convenient facility of transferring our affections at will to the highest bidder, and to be caught by the glitter of a coronet sooner than by the brightness of a character. Lord Walsingham, I am not one of these; I am deeply susceptible of kindness and attachment—where I once love I must love for ever: but pride, if no better motive prompted me, would deter me from entering into a conventional alliance that could be severed with a word, and sundered without a sigh."

"Celestine, let me assure you that I am sincere in the offer I have made," replied the nobleman, slightly abashed by the spirit she had manifested, and showing in the lessened confidence of his manner the effect that this speech had produced upon him. "I have listened to you with interest, with a respectful acknowledgment of the right that you have thus to inquire into my future arrangements. In return, Celestine, hear me. It is my determination never to marry, but at the same time I cannot be supposed insensible to the happiness I should derive from an attachment that is constant and permanent. If you will become the mistress of this mansion, and accept with it the adoration of its owner, sure of his undivided homage, and secure in his fidelity, I will prove to you that our union, though unrecognised by the more precise, shall not be wanting in those conditions that combine to render such alliances happy and lasting."

"Then, my lord, I will confess to you, that from what I have heard—from all that I have seen—that if I could be induced to accept such terms, it would be to your lordship that I should yield," said the opera-dancer, casting her eyes diffidently to the ground, where the scattered leaves of a rose that she had thoughtlessly plucked to pieces, as these words were spoken, seemed to symbolise the fate to which she had consigned herself.

"Thanks, thanks, my charming Celestine, for this encouragement," returned Lord Walsingham. "To-morrow evening, then, I shall anxiously await your decision."

Celestine timidly murmured an affirmative, and they saw advancing towards them Madame Romani, who had been loitering behind under the pretext of gathering a bouquet, with which she appeared, and who now interrupted further conversation by reminding Celestine that there were some important purchases to be made before they returned home, and which must necessarily hasten their departure. As if utterly unacquainted with the nature of the communication that had taken place between the nobleman and her protegé, she pretended to see nothing in her heightened colour or embarrassed manner to provoke suspicion; and the visit was soon after brought to a conclusion, without a remark being added by either of the party that could be construed into an allusion to the scene that had occurred in the bower.

"My dear Romani," said Celestine to her companion, as they were returning in the vehicle to town, "how imprudent has been this meeting, and with what surprise have I heard that you, with a knowledge of the sentiments expressed by Lord Walsingham, purposely brought me here to listen to them! That I, who have so indignantly rejected every overture of the kind, should be so suddenly betrayed into this—and by you!"

"You will not reproach me," answered the songstress, "when I explain to you those reasons that influenced me in what I have done, and with which you should have been made acquainted before we set forth, had I not been afraid your sensitive mind would have taken fright at the proposal. But tell me, first of all, how do you like Lord Walsingham?"

"Oh, he is too kind, too prepossessing in his manner not to be agreeable," exclaimed Celestine with earnestness; "and he is exceedingly handsome. As for his qualities of heart as well as person, you have rung his praises in my ear so often, that I am bound to believe in their excellence on your authority."

"And what possible scruples could you have that would prevent your acceptance of such a man as a husband?"

"Perhaps none" rejoined the danseuse; "but then it is not . husband that he has made his advances."

"It is the same thing, Celestine, in all but the name," continued the songstress, persuasively. "I have my own rigid notions of strict morality, too; but not one of them would interfere with my acceptance of such an eligible offer as that which Lord Walsingham has made."

"You are acquainted, then, with what has passed?"

"I can guess it pretty accurately. I can picture to myself, as soon as I had purposely left you a few minutes to enjoy each other's company, his avowal of an attachment that he has long urged me to reveal to you. I can fancy, first, your surprise; then your distrust, as he began to plead his deep devotion; and then I can understand your heart fluttering with excitement as you hesitated to grant or reject the favours he sued so passionately to obtain."

"And if I held out hopes to him of acceding to his proposal, should I not lower myself in his eyes as well as in your own?" asked the opera-dancer.

"The reply that I must give," continued Madame Romani, "will convince you that I have far different views of your position. It was to secure you a desirable friend that I thus brought you to a nobleman who has wealth to make his protection valuable, and accomplishments to render his society agreeable. You are now in the zenith of a career as brilliant as it is deservedly prosperous. At present your exertions are attended with more than honours for their reward; but the current of public favour is a most uncertain stream—one moment you may be drifting placidly along its surface, with the breath of popularity wafting you into the haven of fortune, and the next you are left by the receding of the uncertain tide, stranded and wrecked, without a helping hand for the present or a hope for the future. It was to shield you from these reverses that I have introduced to you one whom you may love, as well as look up to for support; and if your alliance is not that which I should have otherwise wished you to form, it is only because such an alliance is not to be obtained with the only class that will give you the pre-eminence of station to which you are entitled."

With many such speeches, teeming with specious sophistry, did Madame Romani strive to conquer the prejudices of the opera-dancer; and when the carriage

again drew up before the door of her domicile, Celestine gave her friend the assurance that by the following night she would decide upon the answer to be returned.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEW PROJECTS.

Turning out of the Strand into Newcastle Street, and passing beneath a sombre-looking archway on the right, the passenger, whose business or curiosity may have led him into that locality, will find that he has entered upon a dark quadrangle of ancient and gloomy aspect, the air of quiet dreamy repose pervading which will be the more striking from its unexpected contrast with the noisy region he has just quitted.

It is one of the few "inns" that have remained unaltered by the touch of modern innovation; and though neither rich in antique associations, nor teeming, like the favoured dwelling of the Knights Templars, with the recollections of historic lore, yet, if the pedestrian be of a meditative turn, he may look down to the flagstones round about him, and fancy every blur and indentation of the pavement is the mark of a weary debtor's foot—the chronicle of a struggling tradesman sning from his inexorable persecutor of the law the boon of time—and then shall the soot-encrusted windows that look out upon them seem to have a story graven upon every pane. Here may he calculate how many portly volumes, brimmed with legal learning, and running over with the quirks and quiddities of a lawyer's brain, have emanated from these cobwebbed chambers; how many measures of the midnight oil those smoky panels have seen consumed. And here may he reckon up the shattered hopes and wasted fortunes that those time-rusted ceilings have looked down upon, or wonder in his vision of the past what dignified footsteps may have creaked up those dark and rambling staircases, and what heart-stirring legends may lurk in the records that lie in mouldy oblivion about the closets of the old chambers.

The stillness that forms the principal feature of the place on the first entrance, is, however, by no means characteristic of the dwellers in the buildings that surround it. A glance at the names that figure on the outer portals, and which are duplicated on the doorways within, will show the legal profession to be the one mostly in favour with the inhabitants; and by these industrious practitioners the minor wheels that belong to that mighty engine of complicated machinery called "the law" are being ceaselessly and vigorously kept in constant motion.

Small attorneys, and people of that class who hang about the skirts of the law courts, mingled with some of the better kind of solicitors, have here long congregated in a numerous body, clustering round the darkest nooks and corners, and, as if in obedience to the recognised force of gravitation, taking the ground floors in preference to the upper, as being possibly nearest to a certain nameless individual, with whom they are popularly supposed to have established a partnership connection.

In one of these houses Mr. Parkins had for many years rented a suite of three rooms; these he called his chambers, and the principal division—for the other two were merely ante-rooms—was fitted up as "the office." Here, at any time of the day between nine and five, there would be seen a small boy perpetually scribbling away behind a lofty desk that was railed all round, and had the apertures blocked up with bills and dusty documents, that looked important, but served no other purpose than to keep the inquisitive eye of a visitor from travelling over the papers that might be on the sloping side. Parallel with this imposing article of furniture, that formed the great arena where Mr. Parkins fought out his battles with his clients, was a high leathern office-stool, on to which the small boy had to wrench himself at periodical intervals, by a violent application of his gymnastic powers. Against the walls were ranged a number of shelves, bearing the accumulated evidence of law cases long since terminated, and these were so thickly embedded in successive layers of dust, that it was palpable many years had elapsed since they had been last disturbed. A few law books, a couple of crazy cane-bottomed chairs, a mysterious iron chest, fixed in one of the recesses, which, notwithstanding its obtrusive, consequential look, seldom contained property of more value than a crust of bread and cheese, furtively placed there by the juvenile member of the firm, and a large sheet almanack, ingeniously wafered against the wall to conceal an unsightly rent in the paper behind it, made up the details of the furniture which adorned the official residence of the man of law.

Having, for some trifling violation of the code of morality a few years before, been struck off the rolls, Mr. Parkins had no longer confined himself to the narrow sphere for his abilities to which he would have been limited by the mere practice of an attorney. His genius required a wider range, and he had become a profound genealogist, a ferret after the traces of forgotten claims, and a recognised dealer in old law-suits; by means of which he had contrived to dexterously possess himself of a small fortune by assisting others to obtain their rights. His last successful effort in this way, the result of many years previous forethought and calculation, had been the means of crowning his labours with a sum that rendered all further scheming of a similar kind unnecessary; and he was now on the eve of retiring into the privacy of domestic life, with a firm belief that he had at the same time done his duty to society and properly provided for himself. Before, however, he thus took his farewell of the busy vineyard in which he had been so assiduous and successful a labourer, it was his earnest wish to raise himself above the grade to which he belonged; and with that impression he began to look out for the best mode of increasing his personal importance, and of elevating him to a prouder position, from which he could take his departure with effect.

With these ambitious projects foremost in his thoughts, he now for the last time paid a visit to his chambers in Lyon's Inn, having prepared the small boy for his approaching abdication some weeks previously.

It was just noon when Mr. Parkins crossed the threshold of his office; and having opened the door suddenly, and without any previous intimation of his presence, he had come upon his miniature representative at that critical moment when the periodical attack of appetite to which he was subject caused him to descend from his official perch, and partially bury himself in the iron safe before referred to.

"Hollo! you Dick! any body been here yet?" inquired Mr. Parkins, marching up to the fireplace, and startling, by a smart blow with his umbrella, the unhappy fugitive from his retreat. "Any gentleman called here this morning?"

"No, sir, only the postman," replied the small boy, quickly, turning round and getting very red in the face from a rebellious crumb that would not calmly

submit to such summary deglutition. "He left that letter, sir."

As Parkins took up the epistle and began to read it, the detected culprit, who was a shambling, undersized lad, with a visage sharp and shrewd enough to make him look several years older than his figure indicated, availed himself of the opportunity to transfer to his pockets the undevoured fragments of the morning meal; and having thus disposed of the evidence against him, he assumed a look of the most impressive innocence.

"Hum! Ha! Very remarkable, certainly! Where *can* the money come from?" ejaculated Mr. Parkins, with a manifestation of some perplexity, as, having finished its perusal, he refolded the letter and placed it in his pocket-book; "one hundred thousand pounds paid in three days, and yet nobody knows who he is. Extraordinary, very!" and with these soliloquising comments he dipped his fingers twice or thrice nervously into his snuff-box, and began cogitating on the circumstances that had given rise to his amazement. After a few minutes' reflection, his attention was diverted to the boy, who had been fumbling unhappily after the stray morsels that he had stowed away in the recesses of his corduroys, and he exclaimed:

"By the way, Dick, you may as well give me the key, for I shall not want you after to-day. Got any place to go to, eh?"

"No, sir," responded the boy, dolefully, as he surrendered possession of his sign of office, which came up from one of the pockets with a curious mixture of fluff and cheese crumbs stuck all about the wards; "mother was thinking of asking you, sir, to let me stop here until you let the chambers."

"No, no," said his employer, "that would never do. Idleness is the root of all evil. What did your copy-book tell you, sir? An idle brain is the workshop of the gentleman in black. You must find some active employment, Dick."

"Yes, sir," assented the lad, "mother was thinking of getting a place for me as captain's boy on one of the river steamers."

"Let me see, how long have you been with me now?" inquired Mr. Parkins, who, being much addicted to uttering pithy apothegms for the edification of those in his employ, regarded the examples set forth in the copy-books as comprising the whole code of morality; "it is written somewhere, I think, that good masters make good servants."

"Very nearly two years now, sir."

"And during that time you have adhered pretty faithfully to the instructions I gave you, when you first entered the office," said Parkins approvingly; "you have been attentive to your duties, quick in your errands, and zealous in my interest; and now, I should think, from the great opportunities you have had, that you feel yourself competent to undertake any law-clerk's situation."

"Yes, sir," answered Dick unhesitatingly, though his great opportunities had consisted only of sweeping out the office in the morning, and fixing himself on the high stool the rest of the day—duties which, though fulfilled with commendable regularity, are not presumed to inspire the performer with any remarkably profound knowledge of legal matters.

"Well," remarked Parkins, "I will see what can be done for you; but, remember, you must render me a strict account, Dick, of all you do, and of all that you see and hear, wherever I may place you. In consideration of past services, there is a shilling extra for you; and now take this letter down to Freeman and Co.'s, Cornhill, wait for an answer, and be back again directly. Take notice what they say to each other whilst they read it; mind and don't fail to make me acquainted with it. There, run along, and when you return I will give you a written character."

"Thank you, sir," cried Dick briskly, as he tossed his cap off the hook where it hung, and made for the door. "Beg your pardon, sir; Mr. Parkins is disengaged to you, I know, sir." This was said to a dashingly-dressed personage that he encountered as he went out, and who, after receiving this intimation, crossed into the office, whilst Dick vanished through the gateway, and recommenced an attack upon his concealed provisions, which lasted some distance beyond Temple Bar.

"A sharp lad that of yours," said the new-comer, as he entered, and who was no other than Fitzroy Greene; "you should keep him about you, though it's a pity he isn't older. I wonder you trusted him with the care of a place like this."

"I never let any body transact business for me," rejoined Parkins; "what there is to be done, I do myself, and always have done. That is the reason I never would have a regular clerk,—they get at last to learn too much, and then become troublesome. That's the boy for me; he is fifteen, and looks nine; people don't think it worth while to be cautious before him, and so I learn a great deal sometimes that I never should otherwise; no bad plan that, you see;" and Mr. Parkins looked slily over his spectacles, and winked at his own sagacity.

"What a cunning fellow you are!" said Green; "when you give up business the world will lose the advantage of the manœuvres that you are constantly throwing into it. That lad ought to have got by this time all the benefit of your experience."

"If you wanted a tiger now, you couldn't pitch upon a better boy for the purpose," suggested Parkins, as an idea connected with some future scheming occurred to that effect; "I can give him a capital recommendation."

"Then on that recommendation I will engage him," said Greene; "for I happen just to be in want of such an appendage to my establishment. And now, as I am here, punctual, I believe, to the time you indicated in your note, have the goodness to enlighten me as to the project which you alluded to so mysteriously."

"Look at this," responded Parkins; and, drawing from out his pocket-book a folded slip of printed paper, he gave it to Greene, who read as follows:—

"EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY.—In this age of wonders, when science and art are constantly being employed in the production of new marvels, we no longer hesitate to receive with respect the announcement of a discovery that appears, at first, to make some strong demands upon our credulity. But the improbable is not henceforth destined to be confounded with the impossible. We have been this day favoured with the private view of some experiments that we have no hesitation in declaring will at once establish as an irrefutable fact the possibility of a new mode of aerial propulsion being brought to a successful issue. As a public company have taken up this startling invention with the design of bringing its merits fairly before the world, we abstain, for the present, from making further allusions to what we are confident will introduce a great era in our present restricted powers of travelling from place to place."

"This is to me as unintelligible as a Chinese puzzle,

or an hieroglyphic from the Pyramids," remarked Greene, as he returned the paper; "it seems to be the preliminary announcement of a new company starting; but what I have to do with it, curse me if I can tell."

"My dear sir," returned Parkins, in his oiliest manner, "you have every thing to do with it. You are the company yourself, and I am the honourable secretary and treasurer *pro tem.*"

"Unriddle me this enigma."

"Simply then, this is the result of the conversation that you and I had together a few days ago. You intimated your wish to establish some profitable connection with a public association, and I immediately created one ready for your use."

"But what are the preparations you have made? and what is the mode by which this extraordinary power is to be achieved?"

"Electricity," responded Parkins, with a knowing leer, "that wonderful power, sir, about which every body will now believe any thing, and of which the most scientific confess they know nothing. Every body is to have the means of flying placed at their disposal—wings for the million—pinions for the people—a gigantic scheme, my dear sir, affording us a vast field for speculation."

"Of course dropping the first letter of the last word?"

"To be sure," agreed Parkins, his face illumined with a reciprocal smile; "we must take care of our own interests first. I shall to-night draw up the prospectus, and to-morrow they shall be issued to a select few. The United Kingdom General Flying Company, provisionally registered; capital 100,000*l.*, in shares of 5*l.* London to Canton in fifteen minutes, and all that sort of thing. Safe to take."

"Really, Parkins, I think you had better have devised something more feasible. I am afraid this is too bold a claim on general gullibility."

"Nonsense, my good fellow," argued Parkins; "the more outrageous any idea is, the more certain is it to command notice now-a-days. Give that same bump of credulity a good hard knock, and you will make an impression where a slight tap will pass off unobserved. I am having a few working models made that will serve as toys to amuse the first batch of hungry shareholders we get; and when the scheme is ripe for dissolution, the bubble bursts, and scatters a few thousands into our pockets for the trouble we have taken."

"And this paragraph——?"

"Is paid for, and appears this very day in one of the evening newspapers, by which means we shall get a hold on the public ear, with the detailed particulars that will follow. We shall be sure of getting a few good names to start with, for there are plenty of rich noblemen who love to have their titles brought before the world in connection with scientific schemes; and I will take care to make the whole affair look as plausible as possible."

"Well, I resign the formation of its plan entirely to yourself, in the first instance," replied Greene; "and when I am called upon to figure in it, you shall have the best assistance in my power. How proceeds our project in the north?"

"Ha! there we are baffled—defeated," returned Parkins, with a sigh; "but we have the satisfaction of knowing that we have been conquered by a most formidable opponent. I received a letter from our agent at Manchester this morning, who informs me that every share in the market has been bought up by a person who calls himself Sir John Barrington, though what connection he has with our baronetcy I can't discover. He is said to have just returned from abroad, and to be amazingly rich, as, indeed, he ought to be from the extensive purchases he is making. In railways alone he has invested a hundred thousand pounds in three days, paid in ready money; and go where you will, among carriage-builders, picture-dealers, or jewellers, you shall constantly hear of some fresh order that is being executed for him. I suppose he will turn out to be some wealthy old nabob who has been amassing a fortune in India all his life, and who has now grown from a cadet to a Crœsus."

"Then this project of yours will be thought of just in time; for I suspect our enjoyment of the estate to which you have appointed me as the long-lost heir will not be of very long duration. They are beginning to look at the authenticity of the claim that has been established, rather more closely than I desire."

"They are too late, my dear sir," contentedly added Parkins, "much too late to effect any useful purpose by their examination. Those papers will bear the closest scrutiny. There is, indeed, but one man I am afraid of, and he——"

The return of the boy at this moment, with an answer to the letter he had taken, cut short the revelation of the source of Mr. Parkins's apprehensions.

"Well, Dick, what did they say?" inquired Parkins, shifting his spectacles so as to look at the messenger with a full, penetrating eye.

The boy glanced suspiciously at the form of Greene, but receiving the token of an assuring nod from his master that the tenor of the reply might be communicated aloud without scruple, he intimated that the firm to which he had been dispatched were quite willing to negotiate the bills on the terms that had been proposed.

"And did they make any observation?" pursued Parkins; "did they seem to hesitate at all?"

"I heard the head clerk say in a whisper, as I left, that he thought you could have hardly come by the bills in a fair manner," said the boy, looking boldly upwards into the face of his employer, without wavering in a single muscle.

"I'll have that impertinent Jackson discharged to-morrow," muttered Parkins threateningly, and at the same time colouring up with the imputation. "But come here, Dick," he added quickly after, softening his tone; "Mr. Fitzroy Greene has kindly promised to take you into his service. How would you like to be a tiger?"

"What! and wear top-boots and buttons!" ejaculated Dick, delightedly, with a vision of his future importance flashing up before him. "Oh, shouldn't I like to see myself holding on by the straps behind a cab and cutting away through the Park like winkin," and, completely intoxicated by the dazzling picture of the imagination that his fancy had conjured up, he caught hold of the back of a chair, and went through the pantomime of an imaginary ride behind it.

"You must be steady, Dick, very steady," said Parkins, in cold, piercing accents, that instantly subdued the small boy's exuberance of animal spirits; "you will be the constant attendant of Mr. Greene, wherever he goes; do you understand? and I shall expect that you will make him a good servant, and do credit to my recommendation."

Whilst Greene was carelessly lounging before the desk, and whistling through the calendar of the official almanack, Parkins glanced significantly at the small boy, who returned his gaze with a look that showed

he comprehended its meaning; and then, with a return to his former patronising and sententious manner, he said:

"And whatever you do, Dick, be clean in your attire, civil in your deportment, and attentive to your duty. You may make me your model, if you like," said Mr. Parkins, with bland complacency, as he brushed off a few grains of snuff from his shirt frill, "for do you not remember the fine truth conveyed in the copy that sets forth—dear me, at this moment—" and the moral philosopher being suddenly at a loss to remember a quotation that was applicable, tapped his head to recover the absent aphorism.

"Evil communications, sir?" suggested the boy, with a respectful recollection of round text.

"No, no, Dick, not that," interrupted Parkins quickly, "something about example. Ha! example is better than precept—that's it. Consider me your example."

And the boy being thus admonished, surveyed the tops of his boots with profound attention, and then dropped into an abstruse contemplation of the pattern which was thus so considerately recommended for imitation.

Greene and Parkins now left to dine at a club to which the former had got admission, and Parkins having told the boy to stop in the chambers until he sent a porter with a truck to take the furniture away, and his new employer having directed him where to obtain his livery, the two retraced their steps through the quadrangle, and left Dick to ponder in solitude over the change that had come over his own fortune, and the alteration that would take place in the office to which he had been so long accustomed.

His first impulse, on being thrown upon his own resources for amusement, was to entirely subvert the order and regularity of those articles that had been left under his control. He had no sooner watched his late and future employer turn aside past the window, than he began to take revenge on the stool of which he had been daily the crowning ornament; and by way of repaying himself for the restraint that he had suffered through the morning, he indulged in a display of revelry that in a few minutes involved the usually quiet precincts of Mr. Parkins's chambers in an unprecedented condition of dust and confusion. Whilst occupied in thus partially restoring chaos—so far, at least, as that portion of the earth was concerned on which the practitioner had established his place of business—the shelves along the wall, up which he had vainly essayed to climb, came clattering to the floor with a tremendous concussion, making a slanting sunbeam that had emigrated into the interior become suddenly the illuminator of a myriad smoky atoms, and prostrating the unhappy Dick amidst a wreck of mildewed papers, broken planks, and rusty staples.

To repair the mischief he had committed was evidently beyond his power, so he acted upon the next suggestion that presented itself, and devoted himself with alacrity to the task of concealment. Knowing that these documents thus brought to light—and which, bursting from the bonds of colourless tape, were now scattered over the ground in all directions—had remained for many years undisturbed, he naturally concluded that they would not be missed if they were removed altogether, so he thrust them into his blue bag with the intention of conveying them home, and resolved to apply them as occasion required to the ignition of the household fire. The rifted planks he piled up behind the door, to be disposed of according to the convenience of the next tenant; and thus having effaced the principal traces of his skill in demolition, he calmly resigned himself to the anticipations of his forthcoming career as a tiger, and on the strength of his increased importance fired off a succession of saucy repartees against the porter, who came soon after with an assistant, and went staggering away under the shabby furniture, with an easy security only to be ascribed to the recognised advantages of double knots.

CHAPTER XIV.

THORNTON'S INITIATION INTO "LIFE."

There are few words that would more perplex a thorough man about town to define than the one which forms part of the heading of this chapter, and which in its general modern acceptation far exceeds the ordinary description of the dictionary, as simply implying a state of animal vitality.

In the City "life" is intended to indicate a pleasurable devotion to business; in the West-end it is presumed to include only a business-like round of pleasure. The ambitious errand-boy who clubs coppers with his chum, and rows up to the Red House on a Sunday jaunt, sucking away at his cheroot with premature predilections, and firing at wooden targets for nuts with sportsman-like intrepidity, fancies that he sees "life," and believes that he knows a thing or two—rather. The aspiring shopman who takes his "young woman" to the saloons, and goes himself to the night taverns, cocks his hat with pertinacious conceit, and means to let you know that "life" with him begins at dusk, and generally ends in the station-house. The racing amateur who affects dog-headed canes and Derby lotteries flatters himself that "life" is only to be met with on the turf, and the regatta-men are similarly convinced that you can never enjoy it off the water. Thus the confident smile with which the countryman informs you that he has come up to town "to see a bit of life," or the smack of assurance with which you are greeted by the Londoner to prove that he *has* seen it, are merely to be regarded in the abstract as a symbol of intelligence that each skims the surface of his own particular source of gratification, and believes that in doing that he fulfils his mission. Elbow your way into Exeter Hall during the May meetings, and when one of the black-costumed gentry there is heard eloquently advocating the necessity of clothing the savages in the torrid zone with Yorkshire broadcloth, drag the reverend orator into the heart of Carrier Street, St. Giles's, and tell him to look first at home. Bid him mark the same fierce passions of humanity playing upon human heartstrings, watch the fitful gleams of reckless joy and gnawing anguish, now lightening, now darkening the faces of his fellow-creatures, and then remind him that there—there, within a mile of his clerical arena—he may find texts for his discourse, objects for his benevolence, and subjects for his sympathy. Bid him lay to heart the experiences of the life he sees, and compare the notes with his own florid details of the privations of the aborigines, whose sufferings and ignorance he calls upon the pockets of his smirk, alms-giving audience to relieve and remove. Ask my Lord Fitz-noodle, who believes life to be inseparable from crowded saloons, champagne bonts, and his box at the Opera—ask him to accompany you on an exploring tour through Whitechapel—to dive into the back streets of Bermondsey, and the cholera-ravaged dis-

tricts of Jacob's Island; or threading the sinuous mazes of the Mint in the Borough, let him gauge the annual amount of vice and crime springing up like a periodical harvest within that tainted region, and then shall he see such scenes of real life as shall make the blood curdle in his patrician veins, and raise a doubt as to his inhabiting a country thus polluted at the very source of its wealth and power.

The opinion about "life" entertained by Bob Chuckers was of a very vague and undecided character. He had a full appreciation of the merits of stopping out after midnight, and held visits to late taverns to be necessarily associated with the pursuits of true enjoyment; but it must be added that this was chiefly on account of a singular belief—in which he had a confiding faith—being deeply cherished by others, and not from the experience of any intense happiness he had himself derived from such proceedings. He had a great notion of those places where they have suppers and singing after the theatres, and had often thought how he should like to become the landlord of one of them, and dwell perpetually in an atmosphere where chops and steaks were continually sending forth their savoury incense, and songs and glees were to be gratuitously heard in lively succession all the year round. He had a great admiration, too, of the professionals who sung at the small concert-rooms; and it was whispered about among his acquaintances that he had once been the victim of an unhappy attachment to a young lady in pink, who had entranced him with her vocal powers, and who, having sacrificed her charms to another, had caused him to seek solace for his unrequited love in a private devotion to sentiment and gin and water. With the return of a more tranquil spirit, he transferred his attentions from that time to the key-bugle, an instrument in which he made rapid progress; and often would he seek to express through that medium the story of his sorrows, ending his performance with a burst of touching wildness, that was intended to indicate the very depths of despair. As his musical studies could, however, only be pursued at home, and were seldom commenced until the household had retired to rest, it was felt that some other safety-valve for his emotions would have been more desirable, as his exertions were not exactly calculated to promote

the slumber of the inmates. And when, in defiance of the brief fragment of a short six, left by Mrs. Marrables in his flat candlestick, he would throw open the narrow casement of his bed-room on a summer evening, and practise by moonlight the serenade from "Don Pasquale," with his instruction-book propped up against the window ledge, the effect would have been doubtless highly pleasing and creditable, only that the faint illumination generally misled him as to the right notes, and the cats upon the opposite tiles would congregate in alarming numbers, and contribute a dismal chorus for the accompaniment, under the disparaging impression that they were hearing the cry of a feline creature in distress, and were bound to rush to the rescue accordingly.

Yet, notwithstanding all these eccentricities in which he was wont to indulge, and which either the landlady's broad hints or his own narrow income compelled him to gradually abandon, Bob Chuckers was acknowledged, by all who knew him, to be a good hearted fellow, and his visits were far from being discouraged by the Thorntons.

With "Master Frederick," as he called him, Bob became an especial favourite, for rarely did he return home without bringing some present to beguile the leisure of his juvenile acquaintance. In this way he contrived to accumulate remarkable specimens of Dutch toys, bought at some vast depot in Great Turnstile, through which he went on his road home from Chancery Lane; and when this collection was duly displayed in its immensity, it gave the appearance of the stock having been removed to his own dressing-table, where it suggested an intention of going into the same line of business. Boxes of soldiers that shot out into fierce combinations when fixed upon a machine, like an expanding gridiron; miniature colonies, of primitive construction, where the houses were full of dotted windows, and the trees were frizzled at the top like the filagree paper ornament that decorates the knuckle of ham at evening parties; Noah's arks, crammed with zoological monsters carved in wood, and so highly coloured, after original conceptions, that the "Blue Boars" and "Red Lions" found upon the tavern signs were reproduced in the society of pink elephants and unquestionably yellow horses; and besides all these, he had collected a variety of pictures, chiefly of the "penny plain, and twopence coloured" school of design, and which, glittering with patches of blue and golden tinsel, were supposed, at some remote distance, to render up a faithful likeness of Mr. Macready as *Alonzo the Brave*, or Mr. T. P. Cooke as *Rolla*—characters that, from the authority of the printed description below, were to be credulously believed as their most popular personations.

These little gifts, trifles though they were, strengthened the intimacy that arose between Thornton and his erratic acquaintance; and when the time arrived for the former to make his *début* "upon town," under the efficient escort of his fellow-lodger, there was a mutual regard established that considerably relieved Emma of the anxiety she had felt concerning an expedition that was, in her opinion, only to be exceeded in peril by one to the interior of Africa.

Two circumstances had contributed to fix the period resolved upon for this initiation. One was the sudden transfer into the pocket of Bob Chuckers of a small prize that had turned up to his advantage in one of the racing lotteries; and the other was the presentation by a fellow-clerk of two admissions to a *Bal Masque* at Vauxhall Gardens, to the attractions of which place they resolved to devote their evening, with a firm determination, as Mr. Chuckers said, of going in and making a night of it.

After mature deliberation as to the characters that should be chosen for the occasion, and much anxious reflection had been bestowed upon the easiest and least expensive method of obtaining the requisite costumes, it was finally settled that Thornton should assume the simple dress of a countryman, and that Chuckers should present himself under the more ferocious aspect of a brigand, such dresses being attainable "for a consideration" from the wardrobe of a private theatre to which the latter had belonged in the days of his amateur enthusiasm.

These arrangements having been satisfactorily concluded, and the dresses having been conveyed in readiness to the apartment of a friend, who had placed his domicile at their disposal for the evening, it was agreed that, to prevent needless apprehensions, Emma should be kept for the present in ignorance of their destination; and, with sanguine expectations of the mirthful hours in store, the two sallied forth to the lodging of the accommodating acquaintance, who lived in one of the quiet streets leading out of Holborn.

"Come along, my boy," said Chuckers, as they walked briskly off towards the spot where the change of costume was to be effected; "we shall have capital fun to night. I suppose you have no idea now what sort of a thing a masquerade can be?"

Thornton acknowledged with all humility of spirit that, though he had heard a great deal about them, his conceptions on that point were by no means very clear and definite.

"Oh, it's prime," continued Mr. Chuckers, getting exhilarated by the mere anticipation—"drinking, dancing, joking, love-making, and all that sort of thing. Nobody can form the least notion of what it's like, excepting those that have been. At least so I am told, for I never went to a regular one myself."

"Then it will be a scene quite new to you?"

"Yes, partly," rejoined Chuckers, with some confusion; "partly it will. But then I have been an actor, you know; that is, an amateur actor. I have played the servants in nearly all the old comedies; and a masquerade is just the same as acting, only that you have no occasion to study your part, which is a great bother, and aint always easy to learn."

"So I suppose," quietly observed Thornton, "you must have frequently found it so?"

"Got any country cousins coming up to town?" inquired Chuckers, wanting to change the subject; "I could tell you a good joke to play upon them if you had."

Henry regretted his deficiency in that respect, but desired to learn the joke notwithstanding.

"Oh, its famous," rattled on his loquacious companion; "I had one once—a regular north-country farmer—came up from Yorkshire to see the lions—he could only stop one night, so what do you think I did?"

"Impossible to imagine," answered Thornton.

"Why, he wanted to see the Cosmorama, so I boasted I could get him in free, and I took him by the side entrance into one of our pawnbroker's shops, and told him to look through the glazed bull's eyes over the little doors, and he would be delighted. It was capital sport to see him rubbing away at the glass, as if he thought he could see something, and rare fun to watch his surprise as the door opened, and a man with a bundle came slinking out."

"And you then got detected, of course?"

"Not a bit of it. I told him the man was the

Chancellor of the Exchequer with the budget under his arm, and, as it was evident from that the Queen was having a private view, he must come again on the following day. I knew he couldn't, you know, so it was all right," and Bob nudged his friend's arm slily, and chuckled at the recollection.

With this, and such similar discourse as enlivened their progress, they had got rapidly over the ground, and crossing Red Lion Square, Mr. Chuckers turned up one of the bye-streets leading therefrom into Holborn, and applied his hand vigorously to a shining brass handle that projected from one of the door-posts, and which, followed by the tinkling sound of a bell within, soon caused the apparition of a head from an upper window, and a tranquillising response of "All right" from the appellant on the pavement beneath.

In a few moments the door was opened, and Mr. Grigg, the gentleman who had previously exhibited his head, now welcomed them into the interior. With much precautionary ceremony he preceded them up two narrow flights of stairs, and then stopping on the highest landing, he threw open a door at the side, and invited them to go within.

Mr. Grigg himself was a jolly little man, with a round, dumpling sort of visage, and a sharp red nose in the centre of it. His head was slightly bald about the crown, and the few stray hairs that clustered over his forehead were nearly grey. His eyes were small and sparkling, and being continually in motion, they appeared to wink and blink perpetually; but the great feature was unquestionably the nose, which had grown quite pointed at the end, possibly from the long habit Mr. Grigg had got of constantly tweaking it with his fingers when more than ordinarily excited. His apparel bore the signs of ingenious mending in various places; and his continuations, besides being rather shiny and threadbare about the knees, were patched with fragments of cloth that palpably disclaimed any connection with the original fabric. From these symptoms Thornton arrived at a conclusion that his new acquaintance was not at that time in very flourishing circumstances; and a glance round Mr. Grigg's apartment, which revealed to him a small French bed with faded chintz furniture, a toilet service of the commonest blue pattern, a table covered over with cardboard and bottles of coloured inks, together with a few other articles needless to dwell upon, confirmed the observer in his first opinion.

"Now, what should you take my friend Grigg to be, from what you have seen of him?" asked Chuckers of Thornton, as soon as they were seated.

"Well, I should take him to be about forty," answered Henry unsuspiciously, looking at the object of inquiry, who was seated on the edge of the bed for want of a third chair, as if he were some remarkable instance of longevity.

"I mean what trade do you think he follows?" pursued the other, with greater exactitude of expression, and flinging himself back in his chair with the air of one who has propounded a puzzle rather difficult of solution.

"Really, it would be premature on my part to decide," said Thornton, smiling at the oddity of the question; "I don't think I can guess any thing near the mark."

"No; and if you were to try for a thousand years, and then take six centuries more before you ventured to give a final answer, you never would," said Chuckers, triumphantly. "My friend Grigg," he continued, with an indicative flourish of the hand, and a proud survey of his accomplished acquaintance, who was smiling benignantly at a speckled paper fly-cage that was suspended from the ceiling, "my friend Grigg is a wonderful being, called into existence by the wants of the age, and in his own person representing the progress of civilisation as attained by the nineteenth century."

"Don't, Bob," remonstrated the subject of admiration, dropping his eyes from the fly-cage and rubbing up a gloss on the nose with his forefinger; "you are too complimentary—you are indeed. I am only a very humble individual."

"Not at all, Grigg," pursued Chuckers; "my limited power of language is unfortunately not adequate to the expression of that tribute which belongs to you as your right. You would hardly imagine," he added, turning to Thornton, "that this great creature—this marvel of his time, who wants me to call him a humble individual—is, in fact, the very pivot on which the entire traffic of this vast metropolis daily revolves."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Henry, who saw he was expected to say something.

"Yes, sir. It is in Grigg that you behold the great instigator of commercial enterprise; it is to him that the entire trade of London is indebted for its present flourishing condition; the effects of his extraordinary agency are felt even in the remotest parts of the kingdom, and through a myriad distinct channels the whole world is made sensible of his influence. There is not a merchant in the Indies, sir—not a cotton grower in America, but what is enriched by the exertions of my friend; and even the Emperor of China, if there is a spark of gratitude in his composition, should never think of England, and what a capital customer he has got for tea, without blessing the name of Grigg."

"And may I venture to ask in what way this gentleman renders his valuable services?" inquired Thornton, who could not help looking at the plain and unpretending figure before him with some curiosity.

"Ah! he is well worthy of your admiration," responded the eulogist, taking up the thread of his panegyric, and again waving his hand in dignified style; "there, sir, stands a real benefactor to his species. I know not by what simple title he may think proper to describe his important calling, but I give him the appellation of the "Great Trade Accelerator," of which distinguished order he has the merit of being the founder and principal member."

"I perceive," said Thornton, casting his eye upon the table, where, on the removal of a sheet of cartridge paper, there appeared several labels written in variegated inks, and arranged in various stages towards completion; "Mr. Grigg, I presume, furnishes the shops with those tasty announcements that bring many a passenger to a standstill before the windows where they are displayed?"

"I am happy to see such proofs of your discernment, Thornton," observed Mr. Chuckers; "and you will further observe, no doubt, that my friend has raised his avocation to the highest branch of art. His emblazoned scrolls of "*Look here*," "*Twenty per Cent. under Cost Price*," and "*Not to be Matched for the Money*," are worthy, sir, of being framed and glazed and hung in the National Gallery, as imperishable memorials of the perfection to which he has brought this branch of manufacture."

"Well, I do take some little pride in them, I must confess," chimed in Mr. Grigg, now raising a slip of cardboard to the light, on which was inscribed in

flourishing blue capitals, deeply shaded with black, "*Try our Five Shilling Mixed*"—"and I have some satisfaction in knowing my services in this way are generally acknowledged."

"Acknowledged!" ejaculated Chuckers; "if the citizens of London properly appreciated your assistance they would erect a statue to your honour in the very centre of the Royal Exchange, and call it 'Grigg's Monument.' To my knowledge, half the tradesmen about here would have been bankrupts long ago if you had not stepped in to the rescue, and given a fillip to the retail. It was the beautiful curve in the loop of the word 'Sugar' that saved Widgetts, the grocer, from closing his doors, I am convinced. I saw a rival tea-dealer look at it with a jealous eye and then burst into tears,—the look of that label completely overpowered him. By the bye, Grigg, what does the general demand go for now?"

"Why," replied the ticket-writer, "I think just at present the 'Alarming Failures,' and 'Must be sold off to-morrow's,' are the leading article, but the 'under prime costs' move off very briskly, and are about as profitable as any. A customer of mine in the linen-drapery business told me this morning that if I brought him two more such excellent '*Ruinous Sacrifices*' as I supplied him with before, they would make his fortune, and he would consider me in the payment for them accordingly."

"You see," remarked Chuckers, turning round to Thornton, "what I said was no more than he deserved; but though Mr. Grigg was the original inventor of the famous ticket of the large figure with the little one dropped into the corner, I am proud to say he is not above taking a suggestion from me occasionally. 'Stunning,' 'Here's a Chance,' and 'The Regular Out-and-Outer,' are three hints of mine, which I am pleased to hear have not been altogether without their use to the shops where they are now collecting a great crowd every day.

Mr. Grigg admitted his obligations to the inventive ingenuity of his friend, and more compliments passed on both sides, till the clock of a neighbouring church striking nine, Bob suggested that it was time to dress, and the bundles were brought forth and unpacked accordingly.

How the change of apparel was found to be with each of them a matter of considerable difficulty; how an unforeseen embarrassment arose from Mr. Chuckers' discovering that his brigand's jacket was considerably too large; how he was compelled, in consequence, to retain an undue portion of his proper habiliments underneath, that gave a peculiarly punchy appearance to his body; how Thornton succeeded, at last, in clothing himself in the less intricate garb of the countryman; and how the ticket-writer, in the belief that he was assisting each, only retarded the toilet of both, by forcing the white felt hat on to the head of the brigand, and insisting upon the legs of Thornton being enveloped in the cross-barred, sandalled spatterdashes, characteristic of the Italian robber—may all be passed over as incidents inseparable from such experiments, but which are not to be considered necessary for a distinct and elaborate record.

"Rather odd sort of looking-glass this of yours, Grigg, isn't it?" observed Mr. Chuckers, as, having fixed the sugar-loaf hat upon his head, and attached the false corkscrew ringlets thereto, he now began to darken his eyebrows with a burnt cork,—"it makes one squint, don't it?"

"Well, I always thought it cast a queer reflection," said its owner, examining the refractory mirror with more attention; "but I sold six dozen '*all these warranted*' to a pawnbroker, who wouldn't pay, so I was obliged to take that out for the money. But, bless me, what a singular appearance you do present, to be sure!" and Mr. Grigg having looked with wonderment on the face before him, was so tickled by the sight that he went off into roars of immoderate laughter.

There was certainly a sufficient cause for his merriment. Bob, misled by the oblique reflection of the glass, in a vain attempt to manufacture a pair of formidable mustachios, had carried the black line transversely over each cheek, which had assumed an appearance in consequence that was any thing but likely to produce that ferocious and imposing aspect which Mr. Chuckers desired his visage should present.

The marks of this blundering achievement, however, were soon effaced, and, with the help of the assiduous artist in tickets, the proper amount of foreign ferocity was at last successfully imparted to the countenance of the aspiring masquerader.

In accordance with a preconcerted arrangement, designed with a commendable notion of economy, the party now proceeded to regale themselves with a supper off ham and beef, provided at the expense of his visitors, but brought by Mr. Grigg from a celebrated cook-shop round the corner. With this he had also furnished a plentiful supply of porter, the ticket-writer by no means considering it derogatory to his dignity to be himself the messenger on these occasions, and, indeed, proving its necessity by hinting that had the servant of the establishment departed on such a mission, the beverage would most probably have been subject to a rapid evaporation on the road.

With these temptations before them, the brigand and the countryman commenced an active attack upon the viands; and it was amusing to behold the knife of Mr. Chuckers, as he sat arrayed in his picturesque costume, keeping up a sort of guerilla warfare amongst the stray slices of ham that were rapidly transferred from the dish to his plate; and it was not the less interesting to notice the dexterity with which, in conveying the pewter measure to his lips, he contrived to avoid the effect of the moisture on the artificial imperial he had created. As for Thornton, he was as heartily entertained with the strange figure his companion presented, and the novel metamorphosis he had himself undergone, as he expected to be with the future incidents of the evening. Indeed, it was with no little regret that he left the obliging Mr. Grigg, who had been tweaking his nose into remarkable redness at the constant ebullitions of merriment in which the facetious Mr. Chuckers indulged, and hurried away with his companion down to the cab which had been instructed to wait for them at the door.

"Good bye," said Chuckers, as soon as he had got seated in the vehicle, into which he had plunged from off the doorstep with reckless desperation; "we shall be back to breakfast with you, mind, by six in the morning."

"I shall expect you," answered Grigg, smiling graciously, as he waved an adieu; and the cab drove off at a furious rate, to the infinite delight of half-a-dozen little boys who were playing in the street at the time, and who, having caught a glimpse, in the lamplight, of a fierce physiognomy crowned by a hat of an unusual character, got up a vociferous cheer, under the faint impression that some great foreign potentate was on a visit to this country, and had favoured Mr. Grigg with a call.

CHAPTER XV.

NIGHT AND MORNING.

Away went the cab, jolting and rattling along with the sangnine pleasure-seekers inside. Mr. Chuckers was in an amazing flow of spirits, not at all checked by the rather untoward discovery that the height of his conical hat, which had been too securely fastened under his chin to allow of removal, prevented him from snccessfully attaining an npright position. Away they sped over Waterloo Bridge, and through the close thoronghfares by the waterside, getting entangled amid brewers' drays, and dashing np against those nnexpected trucks that are always turning ronnd sharp corners; away throngh the narrow streets that run down by the river's edge and send forth noisome exhalations of reeking bones and putrid carcases; away under the gaslights streaming out in the road beyond, where qnick-sighted urchins hailed with boisterous cheers a glimpse of the strange ornament that crowned tho head of Mr. Chuckers, and which, for want of a more lofty roof, he had been compelled more than half the distance to thrust forth boldly throngh the window; away into the thick of the crowd that had gathered round the portico, blazing with its yellow lamps and staring posters, and then, with a jolt, a jerk, and a rumble, the cab stopped, the driver descended, and tho two passengers were welcomed, on alighting, with a tumnltuous shout from the assembled mob.

Here a little delay arose from the difficulty experienced by Mr. Chuckers in finding the way to his pockets; and from the protracted embarrassment he laboured under in consequence, the ordeal throngh which they passed was by no means of a very pleasing nature. A brilliant fire of observations was opened upon them by the crowd; and the remarks being exclnsively personal, and not of a kind to prove agreeablo to the feelings, the victims winced severely under the merciless attack to which they were exposed.

The fugitive coins were, however, captnred at last; and the demand of the driver having been settled, the masqneraders made a desperate plnnge down the avenue, and thns escaping from their persecutors, whose attention was now diverted to a fresh arrival, they came at once upon the merry throng of the gardens, and had a scene of varied and fanciful brilliancy opening before them.

The excitement of the music, the motley groups that were promenading down the long walk, the splendour of some dresses, and the oddity of others, together with the imposing effect of the illnminated vistas, garlanded with variegated lamps, and richly embellished with every decorative device, all nnited to bewilder Thornton with the novel associations by which he was snrronnded. As for Chnckers, he had no sooner passed the entrance than his dignity became considerably increased, and with a patronising air he offered to escort his more verdant acquaintance over the grounds, and initiate him into the mysteries of the evening.

"Capital fnn, ain't it?" exclaimed Chnckers, as, having completed the round of tho gardens, they now again emerged by the Rotnnda, and saw a party arranging themselves for a quadrille; "this is something like life—don't you think so?"

Had Thornton been permitted to confess what he really thought, he would probably have denied the similarity; but believing every thing to be all right and proper, he contented himself with merely asking when the fun was expected to begin.

"Stop a bit; there will be lots of fnn going on presently," returned the brigand. "You see those two girls in the Greek dresses?—let's go and ask them to join us in a dance."

The invitation was communicated by Mr. Chnckers in his most engaging manner; and as soon as the yonng ladies consented, after mnch discreet hesitation, to become their partners, Bob and his friend led them into the place pointed ont by the obseqnious master of the ceremonies, and the figure began.

Such a quadrille as was now commenced had, however, qnite gone beyond the anticipations of Mr. Chuckers, whose acqnaintance with the modern etiqnette of the ball-room was limited to a slight idea of the first set, and a belief in the primitive country dances that he had once stood np for in the dancing academy of his early days. He conseqnently had no sooner seen the first conple lead off than his confidence began to forsake him, and he listened with nervous eagerness for the verbal instructions given by the presiding master of the ceremonies, and which he struggled manfully to fix in his mind.

The perplexity of his manner was, however, too apparent to enable him to sustain his position with advantage. He got sadly out of time and place, advancing when there was not the slightest necessity for snch a proceeding, and figuring away by himself in blissful unconsciousness that all the others had long ago ceased.

Had his evolntions been intended to give a bystander some remote conception of a labyrinth, and tho difficulty of finding the right track into the maze, the performance of Mr. Chnckers would have been entitled to great credit; bnt considered simply as an exhibition of Terpsichorean skill, it was unquestionably a decided failnre. He was everywhere where he was not wanted, and nowhere when he was; and as he endeavoured to make up for his deficiency in one way by a misdirected display of activity in another, his unskilfnlness only became more painfnlly evident.

At last the dance concluded, to his great relief; and, at the suggestion of Thornton, who had accomplished his part with more dexterity, the yonng ladies in the Greek dresses were further prevailed upon to accept of some slight refreshment in a supper-box adjoining.

"Did you ever taste a sherry-cobbler?" whispered Chnckers confidentially into the ear of his companion, as with his absence from the ball-room the equanimity of his mind became restored; "they are capital coolers."

"I never tasted a cobbler, that I know of," responded Thornton after due deliberation, for the question seemed to be one that would come with more propriety from a cannibal; "what are they like?"

"You shall see!" answered the brigand; and finding the ladies were not at all averse to the proposed beverage, the waiter was telegraphed to by the fingers of Mr. Chuckers, who worked them all ways at once, like a semaphore; and having received the order, the man disappeared, and quickly returned with a tray containing fonr goblets of the compound, and straws to match.

Acting upon the suggestion of his *cicerone*, Thornton imbibed tho frigid refection throngh the medium of the tnbe accompanying it, and gave his testimony to the excellence of the concoction. The rest assiduously devoted themselves to a similar process of suction; and as the operation of holding the straw between the lips is not calculated to assist the powers of conversation, for some minntes not a word was exchanged on either side.

The shrill squeak of a Punchinello, who, with the characteristic step and play of the hands, came suddenly up to the alcove where they were seated, startled Chuckers so much, that he had nearly swallowed the straw itself; and turning round, he was saluted by a smart slap on the back, and an inquiry as to what he would take for his whiskers.

"And may I ask you, sir," replied Chuckers, confronting his assailant with an angry look, "what induced you to apply that observation to me?"

Here the Punchinello gave another turbulent squeak, and playfully tapped the partner of Mr. Chuckers under the chin with a familiarity that she seemed rather to relish than otherwise.

"What do you mean by such impertinence?" demanded the brigand, reddening with rage at this encroachment, and standing upon his dignity.

"Root-te-too-tooey," the well-known proclamation of Punch's presence, and delivered in the original key, was the only reply of the exasperating mimic, and this unintelligible exclamation being accompanied by a repetition of the previous offence, it seemed to Mr. Chuckers that there was sufficient provocation for a downright quarrel. Accordingly rising from his seat, and throwing himself to the best of his ability into one of those pugilistic attitudes that are to be seen in the pictures of the great geniuses of the ring, Bob would have taken summary revenge for this intrusion, had not an unlucky incident, that completely destroyed the fine effect of his melodramatic position, put a stop to the encounter.

We have already said that, on attiring himself for the evening, Mr. Chuckers had found the brigand's jacket considerably too large for his figure, and that to supply this corporeal deficiency he had been compelled to have recourse to the expedient of introducing various artificial aids beneath, until the required obesity was obtained. Among these he had taken up at random one of the placards manufactured by Mr. Grigg, and the violent exercise of the dance having shifted it from its place, it was now gradually escaping from its place of concealment, until it revealed, in three lines of prominent black letters, the astounding announcement of "*Must be cleared out to-night.*"

"Why don't you leave the shop at home?" said one; "Twig the counter-jumper," cried another; "Have you got such a thing as half a yard of calico about you?" asked a third; until, completely bewildered by the buzz of voices and the laughter that spread with contagious rapidity from one group to another, Mr. Chuckers danced about with furious energy, and offered to engage with the whole of his aggravating enemies at once.

A quiet remonstrance from Thornton made him aware of the disastrous story conveyed in the unwelcome appendage to his dress, and, yielding to the arguments of his companion and the persuasive eloquence of his fair partner, he detached the unlucky placard from his person, crumpled it into his pocket, and, with a stern look of defiance at the throng collectively—for the original object of his anger was nowhere to be seen—he resumed his seat and concluded his cobbler.

"Quite a low, vulgar set here to-night," said Chuckers, smoothing his ruffled habiliments and surveying the masquers with contempt as they gradually dispersed, finding the fun was all over in that quarter; "we would never have come, had we known the kind of company we should have met."

"The present company, of course, excepted," said his partner, in a winning voice, and who, with her friend, a tall, dark girl, with long black ringlets falling down the side of her mask, now grew more talkative and familiar. "Ain't you going to treat us to supper?"

"Well, so far as sandwiches go," hesitated the brigand, with a calculating glance at the list of prices, "I don't so much mind."

"Oh, sandwiches be——!" interrupted the first speaker, accompanying her disdainful opinion of those refreshments with a word that was certainly not Greek; "I should like something better than that. Let's have some lobster-salad."

"Ah! lobster-salad, by all means," assented the young lady with the ringlets; "that's the sort of thing for me."

Chuckers calculated the cost, and thought, if it was the sort of thing, the placard he had just extricated himself from had only recorded a probable event of personal application. But, however, finding that there was no help for it, and that on such a repast the two damsels in Greek costume were irrevocably bent, he ordered the lobster and its concomitants with a resigned air, and betook himself with renewed energy to the task of making himself agreeable.

The supper thus provided was pronounced unexceptionable, and with an appetite that seemed to be measured by no fastidious limits, the ladies did ample justice to the delicacies placed before them. The lobster, of epicurean excellence—the lettuce, cool and crisp—and the relishing flavour of the viands altogether, gave rise to a general chorus of commendation; and the stout came and vanished with such magical celerity, that it seemed quite a problem to find out its destination.

After supper, there was brandy-and-water to make the lobster agree; and then glasses of negus round, so as not to disagree with the brandy-and-water; and then came a bowl of punch to keep down the negus; so that, with the varied succession of potations, the little party became less particular and more hilarious.

A slight damper upon their festivities was now cast by the appearance of the waiter, who signified his readiness to receive the amount of the damage incurred.

"Now, then, John," boldly responded Chuckers, who, in common with many other individuals, firmly believed that, by a peculiar dispensation of baptism, waiters never came fairly possessed of any other name, "reckon it all up, and let us know the total."

"Let me see, sir, what have you had, sir? Supper for four—ten shillings; four brandies—four shillings; four stouts—two shillings. That's ten and four are fourteen, and two are sixteen, and four negusses are one pound four, and two crown bowls of punch are ten—that's one pound fourteen exactly, sir."

During this elaborate process of mental arithmetic the face of Chuckers underwent a gradual elongation, until, on the sum being named in the aggregate, it was palpable that no further extension was possible. The difficulty of following the mode of reckoning so much in vogue among waiters generally had prevented him from distinguishing the prices of the several items, but it was clear enough that the mention of the entire amount had given rise to very serious reflections.

Conscious that he was thus about to sacrifice in one night a sum equivalent to his earnings in a week, Chuckers reluctantly drew forth his purse, and with all the solemnity that the occasion demanded, he put down the money coin by coin, with a view of making some permanent impression on the waiter who had

ventured to speak of such a sum; but as that individual coolly shuffled up the silver like one quite used to such payments, and took the extra shilling to himself with the greatest nonchalance in the world, the effect of such a deliberate proceeding was materially destroyed.

As further dancing was considered unadvisable, and the advantages of a promenade in the cool fresh air were too apparent to be disregarded, it was arranged that Thornton should offer his arm to the young damsel in the Greek dress, and that Chuckers should in like manner escort the object of his attention about the grounds.

Leaving the former couple for awhile, we must take cognisance of the fate that attended the aspiring brigand, who, already smitten with the engaging figure of the partner he had chosen, was now improving the opportunity by giving an amorous tone to his discourse.

"Why," said he, insinuating his arm slily round her waist as they got into the more retired part of the gardens; "why longer conceal from me those charms which are hidden by this hateful mask? Let me at once tear aside the envious veil that hides this beauteous countenance, and bask in the refulgence of those eyes that are destined to be the loadstars of my destiny."

This flowing speech of Mr. Chuckers was all he could remember of a stock address that he had some time before studied for these especial emergencies; but though he now gave it, as he thought, with something more than its usual emphasis, it was responded to with no other emotions than those arising from an effort to restrain laughter, for a subdued tittering was distinctly audible.

"Speak, sweet enslaver of my soul," he continued, in the same high-flown style; "am I to be denied the pleasure of this blissful vision? Nay, thus I break the spell that keeps my love unknown," and attempting to gently remove the mask from her face, he was unexpectedly greeted with a severe smack on his own.

"Keep your hands to yourself, if you please, Mr. Chuckers," said the Greek girl pettishly.

"Ha, you know me, then!" exclaimed Bob in astonishment, and taken quite aback by this unexpected discovery.

"Yes, and the young lady in pink that you used to go and hear at the Crown and Compasses," pursued the other, following up her attack; "I need only mention the name of Mivins, I believe, to be understood?"

"Clementina Mivins!" echoed the brigand. "Ah! name not that name to me. It is the name of one who—but no matter. What is Clementina to me? What is it that she is no longer Mivins?" And releasing his arm from her waist, he folded his hands pensively, and looked with a contemplative and distracted air upon a red bucket lamp that was dangling half extinguished from the branch of a tree above.

"And you never loved her, then?" asked the girl.

"I!" gasped Chuckers, who, under the influence of strong beverages, was generally disposed towards the sentimental and metaphysical, and which, being combined, verge upon the profoundly unintelligible—"*I* love her! Look at that lamp sputtering in the oil and flickering in the agonies of expiring light. That lamp is an emblem of my love for Clementina Mivins. It is going out, and so is the last spark of the attachment I bear to that faithless creature."

"You will not forget, then, the last time you met her," rejoined the Greek girl; and uplifting her mask, she disclosed a laughing countenance beneath, that to the staggered brigand presented the features of the identical Clementina herself.

"Miss Mivins!" cried Chuckers; "is it possible?"

"Mrs. Simmons now, if you please," returned the masquerader; "my husband was the Punchinello that came and spoke to us in the supper-box; and I and my friend Miss Braggs, who is a Posy and does the Venuses, are very much obliged to you for standing treat to us so handsomely. We are engaged here at so much a night for the fancy balls; and when you come to another one, I am sure we shall all be very happy to see you, particularly if you bring us such a card of invitation to clear you out."

The unhappy brigand, who had but imperfectly heard the closing part of the speech—for to his distorted vision each object seemed now multiplied by two—gave his hat a frantic blow over his eyes, rushed desperately forth, and, seeing Thornton at the end of the vista talking to the equally treacherous Miss Braggs, he snatched hold of his arm, whirled him out of the reach of feminine temptation, and hurrying through the noisy crowd, who were now getting quarrelsome over their cups and playing off coarse practical jokes upon each other, he allowed nothing to stop his impetuous career until they were safely out of the gardens.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Bob?" asked Thornton, as soon as he recovered breath enough to put the question; "have you lost any thing?"

"Yes, a heart," sighed Chuckers, balancing himself against one of the outer pillars; "a heart that has been—never mind—let us have some oysters."

This strange variation of feeling was occasioned by a loud appeal shouted forth at that moment by a weather-beaten little man in a fur cap and long apron, and who gave them an invitation to partake of his unseasonable commodities at a small stall close by, and of which he was the proprietor.

As Thornton declined, Bob Chuckers, with brigand-like rapacity, commenced a furious onslaught upon a dozen of these crustaceous edibles, aided by a plentiful admixture of pepper and vinegar, which, for the peculiar flavour they imparted, might have been compounded of grated blacking and stale beer. Having thus allayed the agitation of his mind, he seemed to become more composed. Indeed, it should be noticed as a curious fact that oysters generally seem to be regarded as wonderful soothers of the system, and to be recognised in those squalid localities where they are constantly on sale as a great universal panacea for all the sorrows that afflict mankind.

"Is there any house open in the neighbourhood where we can have some half-and-half?" pursued Chuckers, who was groaning with thirsty despair.

The oyster-vendor pointed out a dilapidated building at the back of the gardens, where a light was faintly perceptible through a side-door that stood ajar, and to the public house thus indicated the brigand and his friend proceeded.

It was a wretched, uncomfortable-looking place, with that hot sickly odour about it that night houses generally have. The frequenters were chiefly cabmen, and those nondescripts in straw stockings that hang about their track; and behind the bar was the landlord, very dozy and dirty, with a small tumbler of muddy gin-and-water before him to keep alive his wakeful energies.

The beer was flat, and almost tasteless, the predominant flavour that lingered on the palate sug-

gesting its origin from an infusion of Spanish liquorice and cobbler's wax. It was, however, consumed by Chuckers with apparent satisfaction; and to the inquiry put to him as to the cause of their abrupt departure, he answered with an incoherent speech, something after the following fashion:—

"Thornton, my boy, mind the last words of Bob Chuckers—woman is a deceiver—never put faith in pink—never. Clementina was the one that ordered the lobster, and failed in her truth, and run up that bill of one-fifteen. I was sold—miserably sold; and so would you have been, had you trusted to the promises of that deceitful posy"

"And what do you mean by calling her a pesy?" remonstrated Henry, who fancied the phrase was more disrespectful than there was any necessity for; "I am sure she talked very agreeably to me, and we were chatting quite cosily, when you snatched me from her in that rude and abrupt manner."

"Ah! she was only a posy," repeated Chuckers, with mandlin gravity, gazing solemnly on the pewter measure he had clasped in both hands, as if he there beheld the image of his abhorrence; "she that you thought a picture of innocence, was Miss Braggs, a friend of Clementina's, and who does the posies, or living statues, in those unpleasantly thin tights they call fleshings. It must be very awkward when Venus has got a cold, since, when she wants to sneeze, she hasn't got any pocket to take her handkerchief from."

"She is truly a Venus," said Thornton, in dudgeon, for he was half infatuated with the girl, and did not clearly comprehend the allusions of his mentor; "she might well have been born from the froth of the sea."

"More likely to have come from the scum of the earth," muttered Chuckers, savagely.

"Well, not to disturb any opinion you may choose to entertain concerning her, let me ask you if what I have seen to-night is a fair specimen of the favourite amusement you described to me?"

Chuckers was compelled to admit that it was, and he added, that in his own disappointing experience of the evening's adventures there was, after all, more noise than fun, and more drinking than either.

"Ha, you are quite right there," said a shabby old gentleman close behind them, who had overheard the remark, and was sitting astride an empty barrel in the corner, after the manner of a superannuated Bacchus; "the masquerade is not an English amusement, and never will become one. Coarse buffoonery and the most absurd practical jokes are substituted for the finer elements of wit and humour. Where the visitors are not stupid they are drunk, and where they are not drunk they are miserable. There is no real merriment, no hearty good-humour in these carnivals. Gross licentiousness and brawling disputes are all that an English masquerade can hope to be famous for; and for my part, I say the less we extend such entertainments among us the better."

Having thus delivered himself, the old gentleman got up, finished a glass of porter that he was drinking, and then disappeared through the doorway.

Thornton was just about to remark that there was a great deal of truth in what the speaker had stated, and that he considered him to take a very just view of the case, when the landlord, who had been serving a few customers at the other end of the bar, came hurriedly down to where they were standing, and asked them if they had lost any thing. Thornton instantly commenced an examination of his pockets, and Chuckers, who had been drinking toasts to himself and had found his last excuse for the pewter in the pathetic sentiment of "Confusion to all posies," was the first to discover that his purse, containing a half-sovereign and some change in silver, had been abstracted from his keeping. Thornton had likewise had his pocket picked, but the booty acquired was somewhat less.

"Blessed if I didn't think so!" ejaculated the landlord, as soon as he heard his suspicions were correct; "that old chap we call the Prigging Philosopher, and he is the knowingest cove wot is. Whenever I hear him spinning one of his yarns about morality, to gammon a flat to believe he's a 'spectable old buffer, I always know he's been after mischief. You'll catch him yet, gents, if you look sharp, though; for he lives in one of the small courts here down at the back of the walk, and he can't have gone very far by this time."

With this encouraging information, off sped Chuckers and Thornton in pursuit; but not a trace of the crafty old depredator could be met with. The disagreeable consequences of such a dilemma now presented themselves to their mind; for the inquiry that followed—as to the remaining amount of their mutual finances—resulted only in the production of a few pence. Riding boldly back to the abode of the ticket-writer on the speculation of Mr. Grigg having sufficient funds in hand to pay the fare, was suggested by Thornton, but overruled by Chuckers, who better knew the uncertain condition of Mr. Grigg's exchequer; and the result of a short debate under a lamp-post led to the conclusion that no other alternative presented itself than that of walking back to town by the least frequented thoroughfares, and secluding themselves in one of the early coffee-houses until the hour arrived when they could present themselves with propriety at the hospitable breakfast-table of their obliging acquaintance.

The morning had now dawned upon them, and the consciousness of their disreputable condition, so unfit to encounter the daylight, came with terrible depression upon the pair. Fagged and jaded, their tawdry habiliments hanging loose and ruffled about them, and with the din and uproar of the place they had quitted still ringing in their ears, they would have gladly given any thing for another hour of congenial darkness. But no—the dawn kept stealing on, the light dragging from obscurity every flaw and blemish which they wished in vain to hide, and overpowering them with that sense of dreary lassitude by which the Nemesis of the morning avenges the excesses of the night. The retribution of that return by sunrise, as they slunk dismally through the most unfrequented ways to Westminster Bridge, was of itself a more terrible punishment than any that the most inventive ingenuity could have devised.

They had passed a pump on the road back, where Chuckers had ventured to perform his ablutions; and though he called this "freshening himself up a bit," the process seemed to have quite an opposite effect; for instead of obliterating the marks of the burnt cork from his countenance, his entire face became streaked with the diluted dinginess, and he presented very much the appearance of a May-day chimney-sweep returning home after that annual festival. It was in this miserable plight that they walked over the bridge, their strange figures contributing to the great amusement of a few passengers who had to be stirring early, and attracting the suspicious gaze of the policemen who were straggling through the quiet city of Westminster, and to whom Chuckers was

under the ignominious necessity of explaining their predicament.

The destination they had in view was, however, reached at last; and picking their way through the heaps of vegetables that, being just unladen from the market-carts, were piled up in fresh green pyramids upon the broad area of Covent Garden, they took refuge from the jokes and jeers of the basket-women in the coffee-house close by, and braved manfully the perils of a progress down to the little parlour at the back.

How the two eventually got home was never distinctly understood by Mr. Chuckers, but it was believed between them, according to the best of their recollection, that they really did procure a cab, and travel to the residence of Mr. Grigg; and that, considering the distance had been reduced within a shilling fare, that individual had actually been able to advance the money to defray the expense. It was also supposed that they managed to recover a great portion of their original costume, and that the first request made by Mr. Chuckers, on completing his toilet, was for the cooling agency of some ginger-beer or soda-water. But all these incidents were so dimly remembered, that it may be better to confine ourselves to the simple statement of the following facts, which are known and incontrovertible. Suffice it, then, to say, that having reached their own abode about an hour afterwards, they stole away secretly and privately to their respective chambers, and that in the course of a few minutes' rest which Mr. Chuckers obtained, he felt his bed several times march up to the ceiling, and his body at intervals not appearing to follow those movements which are reconcilesble with the ordinary laws of gravity.

The sensations of Thornton, under similar circumstances, were of the same wild and incongruous nature. He fancied that the earth rocked violently to and fro, and that he was spun round and round with successive gyrations, as though impelled by some invisible power. Suddenly the air became filled with phantoms, thronging up around him, and decked in the costume of every country. At one time their forms were blended in a confused and indistinct mass, and at another they separated into individual identity, gradually expanding in size, like the figures pic-

tured on the painted slides of the phantasmagoria. Turks and Greeks, Saracens and crusaders, brigands, sailors, and punchinellos, all got fused down at last into one indistinguishable mass; and then he felt the centre of his body become a pivot, round which his head and feet were spinning with indescribable velocity, as though he had been an impaled cockchafer. It was with a throat parched and baked with extreme thirst, and a horrible taste of punch clinging to his palate, that he awoke after a brief and feverish slumber, and a stern resolution was immediately taken to shun the recurrence of such scenes for the future, and be content with a life of less excitement, even if it should approach the dullness which Mr. Chuckers designated as "slow."

CHAPTER XVI.

DISCOVERIES.

On the high road between Warrington and Chester there is an ancient mansion, originally built about the time of James II., and which, deriving its appellation from the title of a former owner, is known throughout the neighbourhood by the name of "Bradley Hall."

Through a thick avenue of trees that winds from the lodge up the sloping sides of a gentle eminence, there may be discerned a glimpse of its grey walls and time-worn turrets, battered and blackened in their long contest with the elements, and a closer inspection will reveal throughout the entire structure marked evidence of the neglect which had suffered that once goodly baronial mansion to fall into ruin and decay.

Among the gossips of the village, close to which it was situated, rumour had of course assigned various reasons for the hall having been so long untenanted. No person had lived there since the commencement of the present century, and except when the estate agent, who came down from London twice a year, had apartments got ready for him in the building, no footstep ever traversed those silent and deserted chambers. With the recollection of a certain fox-hunting squire, who had been nearly the last dweller therein, and who, in a fit of drunken delirium, had terminated his existence by blowing out his brains—thereby disproving the generally received opinion that he was in that respect deficient—some had given out the usual explanation of its being haunted; others, with greater probability, alleged that the sum demanded for its purchase was more than those who had been in treaty for its occupation felt inclined to invest; but the most likely supposition, and one that found more favour with the better informed, was a belief that the agent, who was the representative of a nobleman, to whom the property had been heavily mortgaged by a former owner, was too shrewd a man to yield possession of the premises, when the investigation into his accounts, that would attend upon the transfer of the lease, might lead to some awkward revelations of the manner in which the produce of the land adjoining had been appropriated.

There was considerable excitement, therefore, in the little village of Bradley, when towards the close of a summer's afternoon, a few days after the events recorded in the earlier chapters, a barouche and pair rattled into the quiet hamlet; and passing through the great gates up to the very doors of the hall, caused a report to be spread among the gaping villagers that a tenant had at last been found for the mansion.

Heedless of the animated conversation to which his unexpected entry had given rise amid the loungers outside, the gentleman who was presumed to have effected this purchase, and who was a tall personage of about forty, with features strongly marked, and of a robust, muscular figure—stepped out of the vehicle. Ushered with many an obsequious bow into the lobby, as the horses were driven onward to the village inn, he turned round to his conductor, who was an old man that had long resided in the lodge as gate-keeper, and inquired if the agent, whom he anticipated meeting there, had yet arrived.

"I am expecting Mr. Jarvis every moment," answered the grey-headed gate-keeper, referring to a letter he held in his hand; "he wrote me word that he should be here by five o'clock, but it is now more than an hour past the time; and may I ask," he added, in a wheezing tone, interrupted by the short asthmatic cough of age, "if you are the gentleman, sir, who he says would be here to look at the hall, and be most likely our new master? Let me see—the name is Sir John Bar-r-i-n——"

"Barrington," interposed the other, relieving the old man from the perplexity which his indifferent eyesight caused him. "If I approve of the house and grounds, upon a further survey to-morrow, I shall no doubt become the purchaser."

"Ah! sir, the rooms are sadly out of repair," groaned the gate-keeper; "for, alas! it is a long time since Squire Worrell kept his merry-makings in them. I was only a young fellow then, but I used to help the gardener to work in the grounds, and I remember him very well. He was a wild, hot-headed gentleman, sure enough; a little too fond of the bottle, mayhap, but a kind, liberal master to those in his employ."

"And forty years, I believe, have elapsed since the hall was last inhabited as a family residence?" pursued the stranger, inquiringly, and contemplating, with keen, piercing eyes, the ruinous condition to which the place was reduced; "are the visits of Mr. Jarvis frequent here?"

"Frequent! oh! dear no, sir," was the reply, accompanied by a regretful shake of the head; "he seldom comes more than twice a year, to receive the rents of some farms that belong to the estate. This is the period when he applies for the Midsummer quarter. There are a few rooms in the east wing which are less damaged than the rest, and we have fitted up two of these against his arrival, according to the orders he has sent us."

The sound of a gig travelling quickly over the gravelly ground leading up to the mansion here announced the approach of the agent himself.

"This is Mr. Jarvis, I dare say," remarked the gate-keeper, hobbling towards the portico; "I will tell him, Sir John, that you have arrived."

"Do so," answered the stranger, briefly; "and add that I wish to speak with him the moment he has leisure. I will amuse myself with a saunter over the building until he becomes disengaged."

The speaker, with this intention, ascended the broad rambling staircase, and passed on to the upper rooms, which had that day been unlocked and thrown open for the purposes of ventilation. There was, however, a cold and cheerless look about that vast dilapidated structure which left a melancholy impression of desolated grandeur on the mind. The once richly embossed paper that decorated the walls had either peeled off in huge flaky fragments, or got stained and effaced by damp and dirt. The gilt mouldings and carved cornices were worn crumbling away, and the floor was

"And she deserved them all, sir," added the man who seemed to be delighted at the opportunity of finding some one to whom he could utter his commendations; "but it is not those who deserve happiness in this life, sir, that are always destined to enjoy it. She was very handsome, and many inducements were held out to her to enter upon a second marriage, which at last she yielded to; for, poor lady, I dare say she found it was lonely living in that cottage by herself, and she must have wanted some one to be another father to her children. Well, sir, she did marry a second time, and though her husband was a dashing, stylish sort of a person, who was just one of those most likely to run away with a woman's affections at first sight, it was not long before his real character was made known. The officers of justice came after him, and he was discovered to be a man who had not long before forged extensively, by means of some false cheques, on one of the Liverpool banks."

"And what became of him? Was he apprehended on this charge?" asked the other, negligently, but still attentively listening to his communicative companion.

"No, sir," was the reply, delivered in a firm voice, for the old man felt as warmly indignant as he spoke; "he escaped; though, for the cruel deception he had practised on that lovely woman, he deserved the severest punishment the law could inflict upon him; but let us hope that his own conscience smote him, and that he lived long enough to find that his self-reproach was his most bitter accuser."

"And to whom was he indebted for the means of escape?"

"To his wife, sir; that worthy woman, whose gentle heart was nearly bursting with all the agonised grief of shame and sorrow when the communication was first made to her. But she was about again to become a mother, and the father of that child was he who had brought this cloud of guilt upon her peaceful dwelling."

"And was it known that this Mordaunt owed his life and liberty to the woman whom he had so basely wronged?" cried the stranger.

"Ha! you must have known him then, sir, for I have no recollection of having mentioned his name before," rejoined the old man, pausing in his narrative, and looking up with astonishment.

"Yes, that is, I—" stammered the other; "I learned his name from—from yourself; you told me he was so called when you first began relating this little history, which, by the way, interests me exceedingly."

"Ah! I had forgotten, then," said Johnson, "but my memory is not over good at times. Well, sir, you were asking me if it was known that he was aided in his escape by his wife. It was, for whilst appearing to be terrified into a confession of the truth by the threats of the officers, she sent them off in another direction, and Mordaunt fled to America. But the vengeance of Heaven pursued him even when he might have thought himself safe from the power of man. We heard afterwards that the ship in which he embarked had foundered whilst at sea, and that every soul on board had perished."

The stranger here uttered a profound sigh, and in a low voice, tremulous with emotion, he begged his informant to proceed.

"It was then, sir," resumed the old man, who regarded the agitation of his hearer as resulting from the sympathy he felt for the heroine of his narrative, "it was then that misfortunes fell successively upon the poor lady whose melancholy story I have made known to you. The tribulation she had undergone was increased by a severe illness, which soon after seized upon her; and Mrs. Thornton, who had, it is said, furnished this Mordaunt with a large sum of money to aid his flight, found poverty was threatening its approach as her resources were becoming gradually less. In the midst of her trouble Mr. Jarvis put in his demand for some arrears of rent, and though the poor woman would have paid him to the uttermost farthing, had time been allowed her to recover her loss, the agent was inexorable on the point, and on a day when the poorest creature should have been free from such a calamity, he levied a distress which swept off the whole possessions that she had."

"The villain!" muttered the stranger, with a fierce compression of his lips, and then he added aloud, "but you speak as if some further sufferings had to be then endured by this unfortunate woman?"

"I well may, sir," responded Johnson, with much feeling apparent in his words; "for on that day Mrs. Thornton died, having given premature birth to a child whose father's name was too deeply stained by crime to be even borne by the mother."

"Great Heaven, is it possible?" ejaculated the visitor, whose blanched cheek and quivering features were concealed by the growing darkness that now made their figures scarcely perceptible to each other. "But surely those to whom she had rendered assistance did not refuse to grant it in return?"

"She sought it not, Sir John, else would every hand in the village have been gladly stretched forth to save her; but feelings of delicacy and pride prevented her from making known her situation until it was too late to come to her help or rescue. Her two other children were at school at Chester; and thus, without one of her relatives or family being near her to receive her dying wishes, the poor lady breathed her last."

There was a pause, as if by mutual consent, when the venerable gate-keeper reached this point of his narration. The stranger, who had listened throughout with the most profound attention, turned to relieve the fulness of his emotion by again scanning from the window the outlines of the landscape that was now seen clothed in a dim filmy haze. The dew was lying heavily on the grass, the farms and outbuildings of the little hamlet were thrown into broad massive shadow, the windings of the brook were only perceptible by a thin line of white light, the lights were twinkling in the latticed casements of the distant cottages, and the evening star, gleaming with its pure and placid radiance, shone like a bright beacon in the sky, as if to guide heavenward the drooping hopes of earth. But there was one lustrous point amid the gloom to which the eyes of the stranger were involuntarily directed. It was the lamp that scattered its streaming rays from the little parlour of "The Rosary."

Suddenly, turning towards the old servitor, he exclaimed, as abruptly as though the purpose of his visit had only then forced itself upon his recollection, "I will see Mr. Jarvis; conduct me to the room he occupies."

"Ay, to be sure I will," answered the lodge-keeper, changing his manner to the obsequious demeanour that he had first exhibited; "you will find him, sir, in the best apartment we have in the house; it is only used on these occasions, for Mr. Jarvis prefers sleeping here to stopping at the inn, and we endeavour to make him as comfortable as we can. This way, sir, if you please;" and pausing at the threshold to ignite a lamp that he had brought with him, Johnson led the visitor

across a long corridor that communicated with the eastern wing of the building, and only reminding him by a sign not to allude to the information he had imparted, he threw open the door, and ushered Sir John Barrington into the presence of the agent.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

The room into which the stranger was introduced was a spacious apartment that presented a very different appearance to those through which he had previously passed. Here there was no evidence of the ruin into which the other portions of the hall had fallen, and though the furniture had formed palpably no part of the original embellishments of the mansion, it was distributed with so excellent an arrangement, that there was no incongruity visible in its transfer to the place that it now filled. The high-arched window had been closed in with long curtains, a fire had been kindled in the old-fashioned grate to remove all dampness from the interior, and was now blazing cheerily with that sparkling glow, which even on a summer night is not felt to be an unwelcome addition to the comforts of a large lofty room; and at a round table drawn within the sphere of its warmth, and illuminated by two candles, flanked by a couple of decanters containing port and sherry, and having glasses to correspond, was seated the individual to whom the preceding colloquy had referred.

Directly the announcement was made Mr. Jarvis rose from his seat, and sliding the pen behind his ear, with which he had been employed, entering a few professional notes into his memorandum-book, he advanced with a polite bow, and begged his visitor to be seated.

The agent was one of those men whose habits of thought and mode of life seem to have stamped a permanent impression on the outward features. He was attired in a closely-fitting suit of black, that, on his slim and slightly attenuated figure, made more perceptible the whiteness of the ruffled shirt that protruded from his creaseless waistcoat of black silk in a curious arrangement of complicated pleats. His face was thin and sallow, and about his mouth and chin, which was embedded in the folds of a carefully tied white cravat, there were deep lines visible, that matched with the furrows on his brow. His long, wiry hair, of jet-black hue, was carefully smoothed down across his forehead, and there was a sleeky primness about his person that gave him the appearance of one who was accustomed to execute his functions in the most quiet and methodical manner. As with a profusion of bows he glided towards the door, and indicated the chair placed for his visitor's reception, there seemed something so sluggish in his movements, and so slimy in his tread, that the feet could hardly be expected to touch the floor without leaving the shining snail-like trail behind.

"Pray be seated—Sir John Barrington, I believe?—to be sure, sir, I have heard of the name; you have been making some extensive purchases in the railways about here, I think? Johnson, be good enough to retire, and close the door, if you please; I will ring the bell should I require your services—you are within hearing, I believe?—thank you. You can tell your wife I am quite satisfied with the arrangements she has made, and I shall not forget, the next time I arrive, to bring her that little present I promised her. Good evening, Mr. Johnson; and be good enough not to leave the kitchen until my supper has been brought up, in case I should wish to see you before—thank you—that will do nicely; good evening, Mr. Johnson;" and with these studiously polite phrases, spoken with the smoothest utterance imaginable, Mr. Jarvis acknowledged the parting bow of the old domestic; and when the door had closed, turned his attention to the personage who was seated opposite, and who had preserved through the above broken address the most dignified and reserved composure.

"You will excuse this want of ceremony, Sir John, I hope," apologised the agent, in the same silky tones and quiet manner as before; "the fact is, I am partial to seeing a fire blaze again within the walls of the old mansion, and, when business calls me into this quarter, I generally make a point of stopping here during the short time of my stay, in preference to putting up at these small village inns, where they charge very high for very execrable accommodation."

"I am not disposed to take offence at trifles," remarked the other drily; "and I was agreeably occupied during the time I was looking over the building."

"Ha! our man at the lodge was telling me, Sir John, you were anxious to take the hall, hearing that it was to be let," resumed Jarvis, giving the fire a gentle stir as he spoke; "indeed, I believe, Sir John, that I received a letter from you upon the subject; but really, amidst the multiplicity of business, I am almost afraid that I neglected answering it."

"I am surprised," observed Barrington, "that it should have escaped your recollection, since it was owing to your own appointment, Mr. Jarvis, that I came hither. Being in the neighbourhood, and hearing that you were likely to come to Bradley this evening, I determined to drive over to-day instead of postponing my visit till to-morrow."

"Dear me, I did appoint to morrow, to be sure, Sir John, so I did. How exceedingly stupid of me to forget! but really, in the multiplicity of business, I had quite overlooked it—quite;" and Mr. Jarvis, helping himself to a glass of wine, pushed the decanter forward with the glasses. "Do me the favour to take a glass of port or sherry, Sir John," he continued; "you will find it excellent, I know. It is some of the old stock—has been in the cellar here these fifty years at least; I keep the keys, you see, myself."

"I have no doubt of it," was the response, said hardly loud enough to reach the ears of the agent; but believing the remark had reference only to the quality of the wine, he noticed with satisfaction that Sir John had filled his glass, and was not displeased with the silent manner in which the contents were drank, and which he interpreted into a symptom of its approval.

"And so, Sir John, you were thinking about becoming the owner of Bradley," resumed Jarvis, as he again replenished; "it is a fine old hall, and an excellent estate goes with it. The mansion is certainly a great deal out of repair, and a great amount must be expended upon it before it can be rendered properly habitable; but the land, Sir John, possesses great capability, very great capability, though the purchase money required for it will be considerable."

"It is now, I believe, as it has been for some time past, the property of the Earl of Winterton?" said Barrington, inquiringly.

"Yes, yes, I may say the estate has almost passed entirely into his hands," returned Jarvis, in his cautious, silky manner; "the earl, whose humble

instrument I am, is singular, however, in his conceptions about some matters of business—indeed, I might say eccentric. The property is a very fine property, situated in a remarkably healthy and eligible spot, but the whim of the earl has led him to utterly neglect it; and though he has shown, as yet, no intention of residing here himself, the price he demands for it is so much, I was about to say so much more than it is worth, that I really should hesitate before I recommended it to your notice, Sir John, as deserving of your attention."

"In fact, then, you would decline any offer that I might feel disposed to make?"

"That would, of course, Sir John, depend in a great measure upon the nature of the offer," rejoined the agent, in a soft, deferential tone; "you are better able than myself to judge whether the hall, in its present state, would be equal to the expectations you might raise concerning it, and whether the outlay would not be better and more satisfactorily laid out if the money were employed elsewhere. But of course I do not presume to dictate—only to suggest; I am anxious to give my advice, even though it may be against my own interest, with candour and impartiality, and I do think, Sir John—that is in my own humble opinion—that there are investments—but this is strictly between ourselves, of course—that would yield a far greater and more lucrative return than this."

"And this is your firm opinion?"

"My firm opinion," echoed Jarvis, emphatically; "given according to the best of my judgment, in all honesty and fairness."

"Then in all honesty and fairness of judgment, and to express *my* firm opinion, I must say, that if the earl acted with his usual wisdom and discretion, he would dismiss from his counsels a man whose past life has been one of unmitigated rascality, and whose recent conduct shows that no hope of reformation can be expected from him for the future."

"And the man you dare allude to, sir," exclaimed the agent, starting furiously from his seat, "is——"

"Now standing before me," answered his accuser, carelessly crossing one leg over the other with easy nonchalance, and meeting the passionate gaze that was directed towards him with a look of calm contempt.

"Sir John Barrington, this conduct is most extraordinary; the groundless nature of the imputation, sir—the liability to which you expose yourself in making the charge—the uncalled-for attack you have made on the moral character and unblemished reputation of a man who——" he would have completed his sentence, but happening, for the first time, to look fully and intently on the features of the individual whom he was addressing, his presence of mind forsook him, his face underwent rapid alternations of colour, and, in a voice dropping down to a low sepulchral tone, he stammered forth, "Is it possible that we can have met before?"

"Seven years must indeed have changed one mightily, if the keen-sighted Jarvis fails to recognise an old friend. Look at me again, and tell me which of your former accomplices in guilt do I most resemble?"

"But that the dead can rise not to appal the living, I should believe you to be Mordaunt himself," exclaimed the agent, turning deadly pale, and catching at the back of a chair for support; "you are not—*cannot* be the man I name?"

"Villain! you may well tremble to encounter the presence of one who had the weakness to become your victim, but who has now the power to be your destroyer. I *am* Mordaunt—he that you tempted into crime, and then betrayed—he that, among other boons for which he has raised his hands in prayer to Heaven, has prayed for this hour to arrive, as the sole reward he asked to repay him for the perils and the struggles he has undergone. Now that we have met, be prepared to receive the retribution which your cruelty and dastardly treachery have so well merited."

Quailing under the fierce glance of Barrington—or Mordaunt, as we shall continue to call him for the future—the astounded agent sank back into his chair, almost paralysed by the apparition that had risen before him, and the associations that had been aroused in connection with the man he saw. Had the yawning grave suddenly rendered up its inmate, he could not have exhibited more amazement in his look. His blood froze with horror—a thrill of appalling terror passed through his veins, and his teeth audibly rattled against each other; whilst his senses, reeling with the thoughts that darted through his brain, became momentarily seized with stupefaction. When he recovered he was no longer the smooth-tongued hypocrite that he had seemed at first, but a timorous, trembling coward, that felt he had cause to dread the vengeance of the man whom he had hated and betrayed.

"Cunningly as you wove the web," pursued Mordaunt, "you find that it has been strong enough at last to enmesh the weaver. I knew that your lips had uttered the word which was to doom me to destruction, but never, until this hour, had I guessed your hand had been base enough to involve the innocent in the consequences of my crime."

"Mr. Mordaunt, you have been misinformed in this matter, I assure you," appealed Jarvis, in a whining, supplicatory tone, as, somewhat recovering from his fright, he strung up his nerves anew to combat with all the sophistry in his power the allegations of his accuser; "the misfortunes of your wife I was the first to commiserate and deplore; and though I was compelled, in the exercise of a very unpleasant duty, to——"

"Hold! seek not the shelter of a pitiful subterfuge!" interrupted Mordaunt, with a look that enforced the mandate given; "add not, by shallow falsehoods, to the enormity of your already overcharged soul. I ask you not to screen yourself by any plausibly-devised story you may think will serve the occasion, but as it is too late to repair the injuries of the past, strive like a man to atone for them by devoting the future to a work that shall bring restitution to the wronged."

"I know not in what way to understand your allusions," replied the other, with a sullen, dogged determination to contest the ground with his adversary inch by inch. "Since you left England I have been a strict adherent to the calls of duty—following my vocation with that zeal which the earl's interest demanded, but never exceeding the boundary prescribed by law. Am I then to be lectured needlessly into morality by a man who—only that the ordeal of a trial was evaded—is but slightly removed from the condition of a returned convict?"

"And do you imagine," exclaimed Mordaunt with passionate vehemence, "that I am to be so blinded by this wretched assumption of honesty, that, in the canting defence of the hypocrite, I cannot read the diabolical thoughts of the thrice-tainted scoundrel? Must I remind you of the time when, as clerks together in the same bank, you first poured your insidious poison into my ear; when, from your competent

instruction, I gathered my first lessons in crime? Who but yon tempted me to forsake the paths of honesty and honour, and plunge into that baneful track that led to infamy and ruin? Who bnt yourself lured me on first to deceit, then to embezzlement, and lastly to fraud? When, as boyish rivals in love, striving for the hand of the same girl, who afterwards became the wife of one far worthier than either of us—what demon was it who nrged the schemes that led him to his ruin, and then triumphed ovor the happiness he had wrecked? And when that woman became a widow, and, to free her from the insulting repetition of your own advances, I gained the prize at last, on which I had staked my hopes in youth, who was it that crushed the happiness which had begun to grow around me? Basely informing against yonr own accomplice, exposing a sharo in the forgery, which yon had neither the skill to conceive nor the courage to execute, I was driven by you from all I had loved on earth. To save the woman I esteemed the shame of being pointed at as the convict's wife, I fled from the danger that threatened me; and who was it that, to further his own base ends, thus added traitor to his other titles of villany? Who but the agent to the Earl of Winterton, tho man who has built his own fortune on the ruin of others, the sleek and subtle knave that tho world may call 'Honest Jarvis;' bnt who, at heart, is one of the blackest rogues that ever disgraced the human form?"

"These are harsh words, Mr. Mordaunt, and you may repent having uttered them," answered the wily agent, who now, having recovered from the surprise into which he had been thrown, had relapsed into his former cool and calculating demeanour; "had the charge which was brought against you been false, whether it was made at my instigation or not, it wonld have been far wiser to have stood your ground and boldly braved it out. When any great offence is committed, it is remarkable how easily the offender thinks of getting off by shifting the crime on to the shoulders of another party."

"Infernal hypocrite!" thundered the incensed hearer; "you well knew how deeply and how carefully you had laid the plot. There were no proofs existing by which I could legally substantiate your connection with the affair; you had sent me not a single letter, whilst you possessed several of mine. Had I revealed your infamy as I ought, not a soul in court would have believed my unsupported word, and yon would have had a double triumph in gloating with malicious joy over the failure of my accusations and the punishment to which you would have seen mo consigned."

"Yes, there were no proofs, no witnesses," chuckled Jarvis, with a glee that showed the delight with which he now reviewed the circumstances in his mind; "I had been too cunning, of course; too clever in arranging my plans, to bo thwarted at the very moment of snccess. Perhaps, after all, you were right to go—I should have done the same."

"Think not that I was on that account absent so long," pnrsued Mordaunt; "it was not fear of you, but the accidental result of my voyage, that kept me from the shores of my native country. The vessel was wrecked off the coast of Newfoundland, and all perished but me and one of tho crew, who, clinging like myself to a stray spar, managed to keep afloat until we were picked up by a schooner on the following day. Fortune, after years of adventnre and unremitting toil, gave me, at last, the means I sought, and I returned to England; but it was to find my wife dead, and my child taught to shun the mention of that father whom it never knew."

"Hum!" mused Jarvis, "and I suppose you charge me likewise with having ruined the whole family? you had much better, Mr. Mordaunt, lay that accusation at my door; perhaps I murdered the child—if so, pray make me acquainted with it, that I may know the whole extent of my iniqnities."

"Fiend!" ejaculated Mordaunt, "on yonr cold-blooded heart and hardened feelings I do not expect the ties of relationship would produce much impression. It was enough that your cruel conduct murdered the mother—that the love, which with you had turned to hate, impelled you to display yourself as the undisguised monster that, under the cloak of sanctity, I had always known you to be. But though they bear not my name, and doubtless shudder at my memory, I will rest not until those children—*her* children—have been restored to the position which they wonld have enjoyed had not your infernal scheming thrown them helpless on the world."

"Where they will be far better able to learn the true value of that station to which you would raise them," added Jarvis, sarcastically. "But I believe," he continued, after a slight pause, "they are now resident altogether in London. The elder Thornton was a fine, spirited lad when I last saw him: and if your boy takes after his brother, you will have little cause to complain of him. You should be glad, for your own sake, they have been both of them so fortunate as to obtain sitnations, that have enabled them to support the youngest, who, by the way, must be seven years old, or nearly so, by this time. Yon have seen them, of course?"

"Accident has made me acquainted with their place of residence," answered Mordaunt, evasively—"bnt to the purpose for which I came. In seeking this interview with you here, my principal motive was to take you by surprise, and alone; when the subject to which I have referred would, as I hoped, produce a more vivid effect from the immediate vicinity of the spot where the proofs of your criminality conld be gained, and where the very scenery that surrounds yon onght to awaken in your mind those pangs of conscience that cannot be entirely deadened. Since my arrival, a few months since, I have not been neglectful of the purpose to which I have vowed to devote the remainder of my existence, bnt with that I have had another object in view. I have traced yonr career during my absence, step by step; I know the artful machinery yon have employed to worm yourself into the confidence of the Earl of Winterton, and the extent to which you have sncceeded. He believes you to be true to his interests, and anxions to appear a faithful steward of the trust which he has reposed in your keeping. Little does he think the handsome revenue you have been annually depriving him of, and placing to the account of your own ill-gotten gains. A word from me would dissipate this illusion that he labours under, and would reveal to him the true character of the man in whom he has placed this unlimited confidence. On yourself, and the course you may now choose to adopt, it depends whether that word shall be spoken."

"And what reliance," sneered Jarvis, "would be placed on the communication of an expatriated adventurer, who has already flown from the consequences of one crime that still hangs over him, and who, under an assumed name and title, is flaunting with funds that he can only have obtained in a similar manner, derived from the same nefarious

sources that enabled him to evade the punishment to which they had before rendered him amenable? No, no, Mr. Mordaunt—you startled me at first by your appearance, I confess; for, in common with others, I believed you by this time to be far beyond the possibility of a return to earth; but since you are here, I must now tell you, candidly and frankly, that I defy you and your threats to work the mischief you talk about. I am too secure in my position to be frightened by a shadow."

"And if—that I may rescue the tenants here from such a harpy, who has thrived upon them too long—I were now to offer you the sum of one hundred and eighty thousand pounds, the purchase-money required for the Bradley estate, I am to suppose you would dare to decline it?" said Mordannt, with a cool glance of inquiry.

"*You* in the possession of such an amonnt!" cried Jarvis, with a doubting sneer; "when the money is placed before me, it will be time enough to think of my answer."

"The sum is there," responded Mordaunt, opening his pocket-book and withdrawing notes to the value specified; "count them, examine them, see that there is no fraud or deception in a single note, and then give me your reply."

The agent drew the candle nearer; and, after glancing at the other with an expression of amazement, he proceeded leisurely to his critical examination. With every test that he could call to mind, every expedient that he could put in practice, he bestowed a narrow scrutiny on each, to ascertain their genuine origin. His investigation was, however, satisfactory, and he was compelled to admit that he had no scruple as to the receipt of such a mode of payment.

"And what object have yon in view, besides that most benevolent motive of which yon hinted, that induces yon to thus invest a large snm like this in an estate that can never repay you?" asked Jarvis, ironically, fixing his eyes in a crafty leer upon the person in whom he recognised his old acquaintance.

"That which I feel to be a duty, and, in this instance, shall regard as a pleasure," said Mordaunt, briefly—"the object of unmasking hypocrisy."

"Mordannt, beware," rejoined the agent, hissing the words forth between his teeth, that were now

closely set together, and which, with his small eyes darting furious glances, made his face hideously repulsive; "beware how you thwart me, take heed ere you at once proclaim yonrself my enemy. I have yet, remember, the power to denounce you. This money, in whatever manner you may have come by it, can never save you from the fate to which I could doom you, by reviving the charge that was before too strongly supported to fail of answering the ends of justice."

"Even though your own ruin should be involved in my downfall?" added the other; "but know," he continued with an air of trinmph, "the very boast you have just made of the credit which wonld be attached to your accnsations, and not to mine, can be henceforward of no avail. Yon have acknowledged sufficient for my purpose, and now learn this. I am no longer Mordannt the adventnrer—the suspected criminal—the outcast—but Sir Johu Barrington, who laughs to scorn the idle threats of a knavish profligate."

"It is convenient to assume a name—more difficult to embody the person and the features of the one whose title you have borrowed," said Jarvis, with a contemptnous sneer. "It would be no easy task perhaps, to prove your claim to that distinctiou in a court of justice?"

"On the contrary, strange as it may seem, no evidence could be brought forward with a greater certainty of success than that which I could adduce to prove my right to the name I bear."

"How?"

"For twenty years Sir Johu Barrington was in the government service at Madras—he can be proved to have left there a twelvemonth since, and to have come to England. There are abundant witnesses to prove this, and, when necessary, to identify him. Look at me steadily, and tell me whether, despite the story of Mordaunt's escape which I have related to you, you could undertake to swear that I am that man. Seven years have elapsed, the belief of Mordaunt being drowned in the wreck of the "Marion," and the generally-received opinion that not a soul was saved, would all help to confirm my story, and throw discredit upon your's. You would be grappling vainly with a shadow—I, on the contrary, could point to damning facts that would hurl you to immediate ruin."

The agent, staggered by this extraordinary address, gazed anew, with snspended breath, on the tall, manly figure that, now drawn up to its full height, seemed to court his observatiou. He again fixed his eyes upon the features of the supposed Mordaunt; and the more closely he looked the more perplexed he was to arrive at a certain clue to establish his identity. Time and a residence in warmer climates he thought might have effected the natural changes in the countenance; but he yet hesitated to pronounce them the characteristics on which he could rely. From what had passed between them, he had up to that moment entertained no doubt of the visitor being the companion of his early life, and the instrument which he had used to acquire his own fortune. But now every lineament seemed to involve a doubt; and, coupled with the knowledge that an amonnt so vast as that he had seen before him was more likely to be in the possession of a retired East-Indian than a wrecked adventurer, he wavered in his jndgment, and mentally abandoned the first opinion he had formed. But though thus shaken in his belief, he yet considered it the more prudent plan to persist outwardly in a manifestation of confidence that might evince his first impression was little changed.

"Well, sir, be you whom you may," cried Jarvis, with as much firmness as he could command, "I fling back with scorn the allegations you have chosen to make against me. My character is unimpeachable, my honour untainted, and I defy you to prove the charge with which you have threatened me. The offer you have made I will consider, and the earl shall be consulted in the arrangements; bnt understand that I am still convinced you are the person for whom I originally took you, and shall act accordingly."

"And it shall be my task to thwart you," answered his opponent; "for whatever danger there may be in unmasking the designs of an atrocious sconndrel employing the little power he possesses for the oppression of others, I will encounter it willingly and boldly."

"I scorn—defy you," exclaimed Jarvis, now nerved to that pitch of resolution which made him despise all further concealment; "if you are Mordannt, as I believe you to be from the words you have spoken and the knowledge of matters which he only possessed, you well know that the shaft directed against me must recoil with fatal power on yourself. If you are *not* Mordaunt, and have gathered from him the secrets of his past life with the design of carrying out the vengeance that he would have gloried in taking himself, learn that I dare the uttermost you can do. You may publicly accuse me, bring all the information you have acqnired of my past and present life to bear against me, but your threats will be in vain. There is not a fact to which you can refer, but I have another ready to convert it to my own advantage. You may make what assertions you like, bnt remember, that which you may wish to plead you will have to prove."

"Be it so," replied the stranger; "I had hoped to have found in yon the signs of a better life apparent—that in the lapse of time there might have been some growth of honest principles—but I was too sanguine in my expectations. The past has taught no lesson; prosperity, instead of softening yonr heart, has only hardened it the more. When next we meet, it will be under circumstances that will reqnire all the sophistry of which you are the master to rebut the strong convincing arguments by which yon will be assailed. To-morrow I shall place certain documents before the Earl of Winterton that will reveal to him the character of his agent in the truest colours, and to night you may take yonr farewell of the hall, for it is the last time your presence shall be suffered within its walls."

"Well, we shall see who triumphs," sarcastically cried the agent; and as Sir Johu Barrington, or Mordaunt—whichever the reader, for the present, may believe him to be—quitted the apartment, Jarvis rang the bell, and, with an assnmption of extreme politeness, desired the gate-keeper to conduct his visitor beyond the lodge.

About an honr afterwards, Mr. Jarvis, having disposed of a substantial repast, and mixed himself a steaming tumbler of cognac, as a digestive accompaniment, again summoned the gate-keeper before him. The remains of his supper having been removed, he gave instructions for his breakfast to be prepared at an early hour in the morning, and then dismissing his attendant for the night, he fell into a deep train of thought suggested by the incident that had so unexpectedly occurred to disturb the usual monotony of his periodical visits to the old mansion.

"And so," he soliloquised, brooding meditatively

over the fire, with his chair tilted to a comfortable angle, and his feet resting on the fender, "I am to be beaten at last, after all my careful schemes to preserve, a fair face to the world, and a character that none could blacken with a word! Not if it costs me all that I have purchased by my smooth tongue and dissembling looks. I have got too strong a hold upon the earl to be easily shaken off, and this man, this Mordaunt—or one who by nature's jugglery has been born with an accursed resemblance to him—cannot hurl me from the secure position I have gained. It is strange, too," he reflected, as he raked the embers together, and caused a flickering flame once more to fling fantastic shadows on the walls, "it is strange that, when I had calculated so shrewdly on the crowning step of my fortune, the very man whom, of all others, I had hoped never to see again should cross my path, and threaten me with ruin. Ruin! psha! If he be Mordaunt, the secrets of the bank forgeries he dare not divulge; and if he be not, the information that has been given him concerning them can be of no avail, since proofs are wanting. Either way I am safe, and let him do his worst."

With this consolatory reflection, Jarvis threw open an inner door that communicated with an adjoining apartment, fitted up for the occasion as a bed-chamber and there, alone, in that vast and uninhabited dwelling, he prepared himself to taste the blessings of repose.

The room was a small antique chamber, with only just sufficient furniture to adapt it to the purpose for which it was required. There was a gloomy look about it, which gave it no very prepossessing appearance as a sleeping-room, and the couch that had been brought from the lodge for the accommodation of the agent was far from being of that soft and yielding description to which he had been accustomed. It was, nevertheless, his practice on these occasions to submit to all inconveniences of this nature, in order to evade the expenses of a tavern, which his parsimonious disposition led him to avoid as much as possible; and as the old mansion was, of course, at his disposal on these emergencies, he had invariably, on his biennial tour, resigned himself, without scruple, to its scanty accommodation, preferring contentedly to endure any want of comfort, rather than incur any corresponding increase of expenditure.

The aspect it now presented was, however, more cheerless and repulsive than it had ever seemed to him before. The consciousness that he was the sole inhabitant of that mansion, the idea of isolation that forced itself upon him, and the lonely look of the old building itself, made him wish that he had slept, for that night at least, at the village inn. He opened the door again and looked at the apartment he had just quitted, but the fire had died completely out, and there was not even a spark to suggest a cheerful thought. Then he withdrew the curtain that had been slung across the window, but the moonlight, as it streamed in through the casement, only made such spectral shadows on the wall that he involuntarily turned from the contemplation of these images falling into such grim and ghastly combinations, and looked out upon the landscape itself. Somehow—he had never noticed it till then—there was a certain cottage that came into view, more distinct and prominent from that window than he had ever observed it from any other, and the trees that bent and swayed before it in the fitful gusts of the night breeze appeared to have assumed more the semblance of funeral plumes than he had ever thought before. It was a strange fancy, too, that the white gable ends and angles of the buildings round seemed to fashion themselves into vague outlines, as in mockery of human faces, and that in one he could trace the profile of a countenance he well knew, and which, to his heated imagination, seemed to be turned reproachfully towards him. And then he thought of Mordaunt, and that possibly, if he had been really his visitor, he might return, knowing his unprotected state, and avenge himself for the many injuries of the past, and for which that night he had refused atonement. The fastening on his door was not strong, and he knew that he would be himself no match for the muscular form of his antagonist. His life might be sacrificed in the first struggle before he could call for help from the lodge, and he was sure that no entreaties would induce the ihcensed opponent to have mercy on his condition; for he with whom he would have to contend was never known to spare the desperate blow which his vengeance prompted him to take. He gazed around in terror—he could hear almost the tread of footsteps on the stair—his breathing grew thick and hard, and overcome with nervous excitement, he threw himself on to the couch, and fell dreamily to sleep. It is a stern monitor that said darkness! How it makes the guilty quake and shudder with the unreal pictures their feverish imagination has conjured up, and tremble at the whisperings of their own foul consciences! Like the rotten wood that by day shines only as a heap of mouldering dust, and that at night flashes with phosphoric brilliancy, so the soul of the man stained with crime becomea in the dark self-illuminated, and revealed by its own decaying lustre; there are those hidden cells of rottenness lighted up which by day are alike unheeded and unseen.

The next morning, Jarvis inquired at the village inn for Sir John Barrington; but, to his amazement, he learned that the barouche and its owner had departed for London on the preceding night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RED ROSE.

THE eventful Thursday evening had arrived: it was one of the most brilliant nights of the season, and the Opera House was densely filled with a more numerous and fashionable assemblage than had been for some time seen within its walls.

The aristocracy, ever eager to arrive at new sources of excitement, had crowded to see the new danseuse whose first appearance had been hailed with such universal acclamations, and whose extraordinary grace and beauty had been the general topic of conversation among those who had witnessed her *debut*.

To be present at a repetition of her performance, parties had been postponed, projected visits to the sea-side put off to a future day, arrangements for routs countermanded, and invitations to conversaziones declined. The *élite* of rank and fashion filled the boxes and the stalls, and there was a general buzz of expectation when the curtain had fallen on the last act of the opera.

Behind the scenes was presented a display of equal life and animation. The favoured noblemen, who had the envied privilege of obtaining access to the interior, had gathered about the *coulisses*, and were conversing with each other, or flirting with the prettiest coryphées that were engaged on the establishment;

scene-shifters were hurrying to and fro with the enormous sides of framed canvass that formed the scenic adjuncts; the ladies of the ballet, decked in full costume, were practising at the wings, or scandalising their more fortunate sisters who were basking in the uncertain sunshine of patrician favour; musicians were hurrying back into the orchestra; the numberless hands that are required to complete the arrangements requisite for a large establishment were each busy at their respective callings; and in short, in every department of that vast temple devoted to the arts of music and of dancing, the incessant stir of activity that had prevailed during the evening seemed at that moment to have attained its climax.

Celestine had attired herself in the fanciful robe which she had selected for the character to be sustained in the new ballet, and in that charming dress her beauty of features and symmetry of figure revealed themselves to the utmost advantage.

She was to personate the *Daughter of the Elements*, and her form was enshrined in a light fabric of gauzy texture, that was emblazoned with the symbols of the four. There was, however, little necessity for the dress to be so distinguished, since in her own person she displayed the chief emblems of each; and in these might have been traced the mingling of her own natural graces. There was fire in the impulsive flash of her deep thrilling eye, air in the buoyant step with which she moved, the crystal element in the silent tear that now glistened in her long dark lashes, and only the attributes of earth were wanting. There was nothing that was suggestive of the gross and ponderous globe, and her light and sylph-like figure seemed as if a breath would speed it onward. She had just concluded her toilet, when a familiar knock was heard at the door of her dressing-room, and Madame Romani entered.

"Ah, my dear Celestine," exclaimed the songstress as she found the opera-dancer was now alone, "you are determined, I see, to make a conquest of the whole kingdom. That dress becomes you divinely—it is the sweetest fancy of the kind I ever saw."

"You would be vexed with me, then, to learn how utterly indifferent I am to the impression it may create," murmured the bewitching danseuse, turning round to her companion with a half smile. "You forget that two circumstances of a very opposite tendency, but to me of a very great importance, are this night to be decided."

"Can I forget it?—do you deem it possible?" returned Madame Romani, with a reproachful look; "I who am so intimately associated with both."

"Here lies my little floral telegraph," cried Celestine, playfully, taking up a red rose that was placed upon her dressing-table, and, rather coquettishly, trying its probable effect when placed in juxtaposition with her countenance;—"shall I wear it, or shall I not?—for, upon my word, it seems to me as if it made my cheek all the paler for the contrast."

"Then to prevent any further doubt upon the point, my dear child," said the vocalist, "I must inform you that the flower you are now twirling through your fingers with such wavering uncertainty has a double signification this evening, and it is especially desirable for that reason it should be worn."

"A double signification! In what way?"

"It was the plan arranged between myself and Lord Walsingham that such an ornament in your hair should be regarded as the token that you were not unfavourable to his offer. Impatient to learn your acquiescence—for he dared not think of refusal—he would not suffer me to leave him this afternoon until I had promised that you should signalise by such a method your acceptance of his proposal."

"Romani, have I again to chide you for this imprudence?" exclaimed Celestine, with a look of reproach that appeared half in earnest and half in playful remonstrance.

"Well, perhaps a white rose will be more becoming after all," added the prima-donna, with a significant smile?"

"How can you thus take a delight in tormenting me? You know that I am all anxiety to learn the communication which my mysterious correspondent has to make, and that on this condition it depends."

"And for your own welfare, Celestine, have I urged you by the same means to adopt the symbol that shall ensure you the protection of one so distinguished as Lord Walsingham. You love him—nay, spare your blushes; I need not even the confession from your lips to assure myself that he is not indifferent to you; and, to be candid, I am now really anxious that you should avail yourself of the brilliant chances of this connection. You are menaced by a danger that may require the assistance of a powerful friend to protect you. I have introduced you to one who will be your lover as well as friend, and prudence should not suffer you to let so excellent an opportunity escape. The timorous nature of your disposition, and the uniform rejection of all your previous admirers, induced me to adopt this stratagem to secure your compliance with my wishes; for your interest is ever nearest to my heart, and I feel that in acting as I have done I have best consulted it."

"Then I perceive that you have already divined the principal cause of my uneasiness, and that, like myself, you have concluded that he who has thus so closely followed on my footsteps must be the one who tore me from the asylum where I was placed, and who hopes to establish that power again over me of which he has been deprived through your intercessions."

"And should this night discover that there exists a close relationship between you?" suggested the songstress, looking earnestly upon her.

"A relationship!" exclaimed Celestine; "you alarm me; to what can you refer? Surely you do not suspect this man can claim affinity with me—that we have sprung from the same family—that there can be any ties of kindred between us?" and as the possibility of such a circumstance occurred to her, her voice grew dense and tremulous with the apprehensions that were excited.

"Yes, Celestine," resumed Madame Romani, impressively taking the hand of the young opera-dancer, and speaking with a more serious and portentous tone, "I should not again have ventured to distress your mind by alluding to the subject, had I not been desirous of at once persuading you to favour Lord Walsingham's advances, and in so doing prepare you for a scene that may lead to a painful discovery."

"You terrify me by these words," said the danseuse. "What horrible revelation have I to apprehend?—without, indeed," she added, with a shuddering gesture, "this man may have been the mendicant who was the companion of my youth, and who traded on the compassion bestowed on helpless childhood. It is possible, indeed, that he should turn out to be the same individual who has ceaselessly followed my progress, and who, raised by some means above his former condition, should now have unfortunately ascertained I was the orphan whom he first lured away, and so desire to regain the ascendancy he has lost."

"My own surmises tending to a different issue," observed the other; "for, with a consideration of all the circumstances which you have narrated to me, I am not only inclined to believe that the Neapolitan and the strange being who has so continually pursued you may be the same; yet I can hardly help fancying that the claim he wishes to establish may be stronger than you have yet imagined."

The opera-dancer, who seemed to read the meaning of her compauion in her look, here sank into a chair, and without uttering a word, awaited with feverish anxiety the further observations of the speaker.

"I must frankly tell you, theu," pursued the songstress, "that I dread lest you should find in the Italian who has this evening promised to throw off the mask of mystery he has hitherto worn, that you have yet in existence a father."

"Oh! say not so; believe any thing but that," cried Celestine, earnestly; "my heart shrinks from acknowledging a parent in that man, and still the possibility of what you say has before occurred to me. Should this indeed be the revelation that he has to make, how wretched is my destiny!"

"Come, my child," contiuued Madame Romani, who saw the eyes of her beautiful *protegé* were fast filling with tears at the prospect of a disclosure so embarrassing, "I have now prepared you to anticipate the worst that can happeu. Let us view the other and more cheering side of the question. The man with whom you were associated on the day when Providence first threw you in my path, was certainly one that exhibited no signs of parental regard. You yourself described to me his repulsive look, his treatment harsh and cruel, aud how, flying from the consequences of the theft he had committed, he had left you to bear the brunt of the innkeeper's displeasure. Here is at least sufficient to make it doubtful whether he had any right to the control he affected to exercise. His withdrawal of you from the asylum where you were placed and his subseqnent desertion both convince me that he felt uone of the affections of a parent, but the remembrances of your early life are so faint that I have no clue to guide me to an opinion. I am at a loss to guess what other motives could have urged him to draw you from your home than the hope of profiting by your interesting appearance in extorting alms from the benevolent."

"It is like a dream to me," mused Celestine; "but I have fancied sometimes that he had visited me before, and that I had then a dread of his return. But that must have been long ago, years even before he decoyed me from the house in which I was placed. Latterly the constant recurrence of those features of the Italian have revived these early impressions, and I have sought to discover if I could recall any resemblance, but the effort was fruitless. The whirl of incidents that followed afterwards, and the severity of treatment which I experienced from my abductor, seem to have cast a mist over the years of my childhood, and now I can remember uothing."

"Probably," said the songstress, after a moment's reflection, "he was actuated by some strong reasons for concealment of which we are iguorant, and these may have compelled him to keep the secret of your birth unknown. I am more perplexed to account for his identifying you after the length of time that has intervened, than to wonder at his now coming forward to claim as his own child one whom any father might be proud to acknowledge."

"Nature never errs," emphatically responded Celestine; "and that instinctive feeling with which we yield the love a parent should receive is wanting in my breast. I will believe that you are mistaken—we so readily believe that which we wish—but should it unfortunately prove that you are correct, that I am really the offspring of that man at whose very face I shudder—for it seems to me like the record of a life of crime—I will suddenly vanish like a meteor in the meridian of my brightness, and be heard of no more."

"To guard against which possibility I have already provided you, Celestine, with a more agreeable alternative," added Madame Romani; "but as I have never yet beheld this terrifying Italian, I cannot be, of course, expected to share your aversion."

The summons of the messenger to call the opera-dancer to the stage suspended the reply of Celestine. For a moment she wavered in her resolntion, and then hastily affixing the red rose in her hair, she exclaimed, "This will decide my fate!" gave one critical glance at the reflection of her splendid figure in the looking-glass opposite, and, pressing the hand of her companion significantly, she left the tiring-room and descended to the scene of her approaching triumph. In that interval the traces of her recent agitation had utterly disappeared, and absorbed in the character which she was called upon to personate, none could have imagined that smiling creature, buoyant with life and animation, had been bnt a few minutes before a prey to the most acute and poignant feelings.

Scarcely had the first tumultuous applause subsided with which her entrance was accompanied, than she received fresh tribntes of acclamation from the delighted audience, who, with every aerial bound, each more wonderful than that which had preceded it, gave way to renewed bursts of approval. Now springing gracefully from the boards, as if her fairy-like feet spurned the contact of earth, and anon subduing her movements to that dazzling execution of difficult steps which testified the amount of skill and practice that had been bestowed in the acquisition of the most intricate perplexities of her art, her performance was throughout a succession of the most brilliant triumphs, and at the conclusion again did a shower of bouqnets testify the renewal of that genuine success which had attended her *début*.

The curtain had fallen, the flowers were gathered up and presented to her, the last note of the music had died away amid the clamour of the delighted audience; and, acknowledging with courteous salutations the complimentary congratulations that were poured forth along the line of her progress, Celestine pursued her way to the dressing-room, where Madame Romani was already stationed awaiting her return.

"Admirable! Nothing could have passed off better; you have to-night, Celestine, excelled yourself," spoke the prima donna, with a warmth that left no doubt of the sincerity of her praises. "Lord Walsingham is more deeply in love with you than ever; and with this diamond ring, of which he begs your acceptance, he returns you a thousand thanks for your kindness in acceding to his proposition. But how is this?" she continued, finding that the opera-dancer, who looked fatigued with her exertions, had sank languidly into a chair, and that her countenance was again overcast with a pensive shade of melancholy. "Are you not well; has this dreaded apparition of the Italian again presented itself; and are you so foolish as to let it prey thus deeply upon your mind?"

"A moment, my dear Romani, and you shall judge for yourself," said the danseuse; and dismissing her attendant from the room, that they might continue

their conversation in undisturbed privacy, Celestine selected from the rest a bouquet in which there was a red rose, prominently placed in the centre, and gave it to her companion, with an injunction to examine it closely.

"And in what way does this become associated with your sadness?" inquired Madame Romani. "To my fancy this graceful tribute to your acknowledged pre-eminence is arranged with more taste and judgment than any of the rest."

"It came from that man," returned Celestine, emphasising the word, and accompanying it with a shudder of abhorrence; "as I bent forward to express my sense of the flattering applause with which I was overwhelmed at the close of the last tableau, I caught a distinct view of those hateful features rising up before me from one of the stage-boxes, and at my feet there fell immediately afterwards this bouquet. The first glance revealed to me that among the leaves at the back of that flower was a small note concealed. I have a sad foreboding at my heart that, with this missive, you will find I have got a real cause for my apprehensions. But read it, my dear Romani, for I have not the courage to do so myself, and then I shall know the worst."

The vocalist, who, during these words, had withdrawn a small slip of folded paper twined carefully round the stems, here opened the note, and found that the following sentence, written hurriedly in pencil, in a small distinct hand, was inscribed on the inside:—

"I am satisfied. If you would learn the secret of your birth, and who I am, meet me to-morrow evening *alone* at eight o'clock, in the Regent's Park. I shall be in the long avenue opposite Gloucester Gate, awaiting your arrival."

"It is, then, evident that this mysterious being who has been so constantly following you from place to place is at last on the eve of making himself known, and that is some consolation," observed Madame Romani, as she returned the note; "he has, however, chosen a singular medium for his communications. I could comprehend a lover making an assignation in this way, and which would be appropriately chosen; but for such a personage to prefer this eccentric style of correspondence to that more frequently in vogue, convinces me that he is one of those romantic enthusiasts who never, even in trifles do any thing like other people."

"And do you continue to entertain your former opinion?" said Celestine, inquiringly.

"Not I, my dear child," answered her friend, with greater levity of tone; "I renounce my previous creed altogether, and should be more disposed to treat the whole affair as a jest, did I not perceive that you still persist in regarding it seriously. That he may have contrived to possess himself of the history of your early life, I do not doubt—the mention he makes of that circumstance, which he knows will immediately enlist your attention, proves this;—but, notwithstanding he disclaimed both motives in his first letter, rely upon it that in making this appointment he is determined, like a respectable highwayman of the modern school, to extort from you your money or your love."

"I know not what to think," said Celestine, despondingly.

"You will not comply with his wish for an interview, of course?"

"My curiosity would prompt me to do so," added the fair girl, "but yet I hesitate."

"I should most earnestly dissuade you from going," pursued the other; "for though I suspect, after all, he is a kind of monomaniac, who seems thus to have maintained singular delusions, and of which you have been made the victim, I do not consider that it would be judicious or prudent to encourage him in this folly. Had he really a communication to make to you of importance, a letter sent to your own residence would have been the fittest mode of soliciting an interview."

"And this revenge to which he so darkly alluded," rejoined the opera dancer—"am I to believe that this is likewise but a trick of his imagination?"

"Let us so consider it until it assumes a more definite form," replied Madame Romani; "for in no action of your life, Celestine, do I know that you have given cause for a feeling of rancour or animosity in the heart of a single creature. It is impossible, therefore, that you can have excited his hatred intentionally; and, should an imaginary grievance exist, he must be restrained from pursuing this system of annoyance by the intervention of the law."

"Oh! it is that dread of publicity that has hitherto kept me silent," interposed Celestine; "and now I shrink more than ever from the consequences. Should this man really have the information to impart that he professes, it would only exasperate him the more if I sought to protect myself by magisterial interference. He might then blazon my story to the world—prove, perhaps, that I am the daughter of a man whose crimes have rendered his name accursed, and so brand me for ever as the child of a criminal. I should never raise my head again."

"Then you will hazard the result of this meeting?"

"Yes, I will learn the extent of what I have to dread," said Celestine, resolutely; "I will be there at the time and place he has indicated, and will boldly await his approach. The hour, so near to dusk, will enable me to go without being recognised, and the choice of a thoroughfare so much frequented assures me that he intends no personal harm."

"Then should the disclosures he may make at last establish that which you have so long feared, and reveal to you, my unhappy child, that the mystery in which your parentage has been enshrouded has arisen from the unfortunate circumstances of your birth, you will not forget that you are elevated to a station that has raised you far above the reach of calumny. You are not answerable for the crimes of others, and your present proud position will be sufficient to relieve you from any stigma that might, in the estimation of some, have been attached to your name."

"Should dishonour be attached to my parents," answered the opera-dancer, "I repeat to you that my resolution is taken. I bid farewell for ever to the brilliant scenes among which I have moved, and involve myself in an obscurity from which I shall never again emerge."

"And so destroy all that I have so anxiously laboured to accomplish," rejoined the vocalist. "No, Celestine; it would be madness to thus abandon the sphere of which you were born to be the ornament. If the refined sensibility of your nature deters you from exposing yourself to the public gaze after having ascertained those particulars which you foolishly fancy all the world must know because you are yourself acquainted with them, there is yet a long career of happiness before you. Lord Walsingham to-morrow will present himself before you; I know that there is a feeling of mutual affection existing. Accept the offer he will make, let the past be for ever buried in oblivion, and be free from all apprehensions of the kind for the future."

"And should he learn the ignominy of my origin——"

"His love will cause him to overlook it in the worth and charms of her who has risen so nobly from it," added the songstress. "For my sake, if not for your own, accept his proffered devotion."

"You have won me over to your views," responded Celestine, pressing the hand of her friend warmly, "by that last appeal. Yes, Romani, for your sake I will forego every other consideration. I will not be so ungrateful as to at once crush the respect which you entertain towards me, and by one impetuous act sacrifice the only claim I have to your friendship. Whether the frightful presentiment that saddens me is to be realised or not, you shall have the satisfaction of knowing that your tuition has not been bestowed in vain. I will obtain, by this connection, the privilege of still being your friend, and the power to be the patroness as well as the votaress of art."

Madame Romani testified her delight at this alteration of her sentiments, and as the danseuse disrobed herself the conversation was continued, and arrangements were made for the meeting on the following day.

After having changed her professional costume for the habiliments of private life, Celestine accompanied the vocalist to the brougham that was awaiting their departure, and being set down at her residence, she bade her friend good night, and retired, with many anxious thoughts for the morrow, to the seclusion of of her own apartments.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE APPOINTMENT.

About one hour had elapsed since noon on the day following that which had been characterised by the events just recorded, and the opera-dancer having bestowed more than customary attentions on her toilet, was waiting to receive Lord Walsingham. He had despatched a note to her early in the morning with a polite intimation of the time when his expected visit might be made, and Celestine, knowing that the hour he had specified was rapidly drawing near, felt her heart fluttering with a variety of emotions, excited by the approaching interview.

A glance into the mirror sufficed to convince her that she had not neglected any of those arts by which a woman can add to the strength of her charms, or increase the power of her fascinations. Without more of those coquettish weaknesses than are naturally associated with the sex, Celestine was not insensible to the additional aids imparted by the attractions of dress, and it was with a venial anxiety to appear before the man she loved under the most engaging aspect that she had carefully studied the best means of producing the impression she desired.

Her suspense was not of long duration. A carriage drew up under the window; the rattling announcement made by the footman on the knocker apprised her of his arrival, and in another minute Lord Walsingham was ushered into the apartment.

"Charming Celestine!" exclaimed his lordship, as he advanced towards her, and greeted her hand with a respectful kiss, "the happiness that I derive from this meeting is increased by the kind compliance you last night yielded to my request. When I asked our mutual friend Madame Romani to intercede for me, I was apprehensive lest you should consider I was too abrupt or inconsiderate in so speedily renewing my protestations of love. But the hopes you so kindly held out to me when we last met, and the anxiety I endured until I received from your own lips the sentence that should make me the happiest or the most miserable of men, must plead my excuse for thus seeking to relieve the torturing anxiety I endured."

"And I, my lord, have also cause to fear that you will consider my compliance too quickly yielded," said the opera-dancer, casting her full and flashing eyes timidly to the ground.

"Say not thus," rejoined the nobleman, taking her hand affectionately; "love is a plant that needs no slow and tardy growth. The warmth of the heart in which the germ is fixed will bring the flower from bud to blossom in a single night, and in a world where all is fleeting and transitory, it is not true wisdom to trifle with those moments of happiness within our reach, which, if we neglect, may be lost to us for ever."

"Your lordship argues with such a dangerous persuasiveness," murmured Celestine, suffering her hand to repose within the ardent grasp of Walsingham, "that I cannot resist the force of arguments so strongly supported. But, as I before observed to your lordship, the motives that induce me to listen to this proposal you have made, spring from no mercenary source. I am not skilled in the art of disguising my sentiments, and though maidenly reserve might urge me to be less explicit in my avowal, I feel that our mutual confidence will be stronger, and our affection rest on a firmer basis, if we, at the outset, understand each other's characters thoroughly."

"Speak on, sweet girl!" cried Walsingham, as with a look of profound admiration he kept his eyes fixed earnestly upon her, and assumed an attitude of respectful attention at her side; "for my part, every minute of my life shall be devoted to the anticipation of your wishes, and the promotion of that happiness to which you are deservedly entitled."

"You will remember, then," resumed the opera-dancer, "that I have already acquainted your lordship with the peculiar views I entertain respecting the alliance that you propose between us. I will not longer hesitate to admit that you have inspired me with sentiments of regard. The attachment thus created I am too familiar with the prejudices of the world to believe can ever end in marriage; but as I feel that, with the being that I loved, I could share any vicissitudes of fortune, so, for his sake, I would encounter willingly the danger to which my reputation would be exposed."

"And you consent, then, to be mine?" exclaimed the enraptured admirer, clasping her to his breast, and imprinting a fervent kiss upon her lips, which now gave back a responsive pressure. "You have made me your slave for life, and an existence of unalloyed pleasure is in store for both of us."

"Stop, my lord," rejoined Celestine, disengaging herself from his embrace. "You are too precipitate in these rhapsodies of delight, and forget that there are certain conditions to be annexed to our contract that may induce you to pause before you comply with them."

"There is nothing that I would not gladly accede to," answered the impassioned nobleman, "if the sacrifice at such an altar will propitiate the goddess of my worship. Name the conditions, and they are granted as you utter them."

"In the first place, should I, upon reflection, con-

sider such a course advisable, I shall relinquish the pursuit that I have chosen."

"Be it so; as your own mistress, it is but right that you should act in accordance with your inclinations. Besides, having attained the zenith of popularity, I am not surprised that you should descend your throne when there are no more worlds to conquer."

"Secondly, as on you, my lord, I shall bestow the ardour of a first affection, I shall have the presumption to exact with jealous watchfulness the most constant attentions from yourself in return."

"I need not assure you, Celestine, that in this respect you have nothing to fear; my heart is wholly in your keeping, and she is safe from rivalry who can never be excelled."

"Lastly, my lord," continued the opera-dancer, heedless of the compliment conveyed, "I shall expect that the love you profess for me shall not be the mere passion of a brief period, but that it shall be as permanent and immutable on your part as it will become on mine."

"These are indeed chains of roses with which you would bind me," cried Lord Walsingham; "and willingly do I submit to be thus fettered. My constancy shall equal the ardour of my devotion."

"Then, my lord, to you I surrender my heart, myself, my reputation!" exclaimed the opera-dancer, with a bashful and yet ingenuous air; and resigning herself to the impetuous caresses of the nobleman, her flushed cheek and heaving bosom manifested her consciousness of the irrevocable sacrifice she had made.

"And now, my own admirable Celestine," said Walsingham, when the first words were interchanged after this avowal of their mutual passion, "to you I yield the entire control of my establishment. My villa at Fulham is your own; and as a place of residence I do not think you will consider it unworthy of you. To-morrow your engagement at the Opera, I presume, expires, as it will be the last night of the season, and on the following day I venture to hope that in your new abode will be commenced the happiest period of my existence, and not the least delightful of your own."

"I have sufficient faith in your lordship's kindness and generosity to believe that the last wish you have expressed will be realised," rejoined Celestine; "and I am grateful for the arrangements you have suggested. But again, my lord, I must impress upon you—and this is more needed since you have yourself alluded to the subject—that I desire no other preparations to be made than those that are absolutely necessary for my reception. I care not for splendour; and all that I would solicit is, that I may live in that mansion with as much privacy as possible."

"And you are really serious in this resolve to withdraw yourself from the gay scenes of life—you that I fancied would be ever regretting the absence of an excitement which only a profession like your own could furnish?"

"So seriously am I resolved upon this point, that I can assure your lordship it is with a view of escaping from this wearisome round of frivolous attentions that I have been partly induced to accept your offer."

"And the glow of emulation that animated your exertions, and the proud consciousness of triumph which must have been their most welcome reward, are these to be entirely resigned without regret?"

"Alas!" sighed the opera-dancer, "you know not, my dear Lord Walsingham, the horrible feeling of depression that has invariably followed the most triumphant of my assumptions; and the incessant and unvaried ovations which I am constantly forced to undergo are at last proving distasteful to me. The very language of praise now sounds harshly in my ear; and ungrateful as it may seem to the public, who have so liberally showered down upon me the floral gifts that custom has taught them to award their favourites, I now shrink from the ordeal of an appearance before them with as much dread as though I anticipated the most cruel and embarrassing treatment at their hands. In a word, I shall take my leave of the profession with the most exemplary resignation."

"Strange girl!" rejoined Walsingham; "you have given me another reason for interesting myself in your favour. When there are so many looking forward with envy to the pinnacle of public patronage which you have attained, it is incomprehensible to me how you can descend without a murmur of regret from the pedestal of your glory."

"Perhaps," added Celestine, more earnestly, "there may be a secret associated with this seemingly unaccountable determination, with which you may become one day acquainted. But let us change the subject."

"Willingly, for I have no taste for the marvellous, and to this your story seems tending. Do you know that you have a very great admirer in the person of the Earl of Winterton?"

"I! impossible! I am not even aware that I have seen him more than once, and that was on the day before yesterday, when I accompanied Madame Romani to your lordship's villa."

"Then it must have been at that time he fell a victim to your fascinations," said Walsingham, playfully; "he has done nothing but speak of you ever since. It would appear that you are like some lady whom he formerly knew."

"Then that explains the interest he seemed to take in me," returned the opera-dancer; "but did you not inform me he was about to be united to a relative of yours?"

"Yes," rejoined Walsingham; "on Thursday next my cousin, the Lady Adeline Temple will change her name and rank, and make the earl a happy man. I am afraid there is more respectful veneration than love on her side; and on his, the anxiety to perpetuate his title has made him overlook the disparity of years between them. However, it will be an excellent match for Adeline; and the earl is a most estimable man for a husband. So that, whatever people may choose to say about the prudence of the alliance, no fault can be found with the individuals. By the way, that reminds me I must call on the earl this very afternoon."

"And can you be cruel enough to announce so abruptly your intention of leaving me already?" appealed Celestine with one of her most winning smiles. "And is it really the earl that you are so anxious to meet?" she added, in an arch tone of inquiry; "or am I to suppose that some brighter eye allures you to the presence of another?"

"The earl, my dear Celestine, I assure you, is really the cause of my departure," said the nobleman; "and the singularity of the business on which he asks my opinion is the more remarkable, since in some slight degree you are yourself connected with it."

"I connected with any business referring to the Earl of Winterton!—you astonish me."

"I should astonish you still more if I were to relate the whole story," pursued Lord Walsingham; "but if you promise to keep secret what I tell you, I will make you acquainted with it."

"Oh, pray do," pleaded Celestine, coaxingly, "and I will never breathe a syllable of it again without your permission."

"Then should the nature of my communication appear so strange, so marvellous in the chief incident upon which it turns, that you should even doubt its reality?"

"Still I would pledge myself to retain it inviolate," added Celestine; "but from your lips what could I doubt?"

"And should any future circumstances occur that may recal what I am about to state to your memory, you will never betray the confidence I am about to repose in you?"

"Never."

"Well, then, although, as I have before hinted to you, my taste is not for the marvellous, and this, as you will find, has a strong dash of the supernatural about it, I will relate to you what has been hitherto considered the most important of the family secrets of the Winterton family."

"Now you have fairly roused my curiosity, and especially as you have stated I am slightly connected with it, though in what way I cannot possibly imagine;" and the fair listener, folding her slender hands and suffering them to rest upon the shoulder of her lover, whilst she preserved an attitude of profound attention, heard the following:—

"To make this remarkable narrative quite clear to you," began Lord Walsingham, "I should tell you that, as among many families of the aristocracy, there exists, in the house of Winterton, a strange tradition, which has been handed down from father to son, with the most scrupulous care, through all the various changes of successive generations. From what I have heard at different times, for I do not pretend to be even now in possession of the entire facts of the matter, it would appear that, about a century and a-half ago, Godfrey, an ancestor of the present earl, had the misfortune, in a fit of furious passion, to take the life of a certain baronet named Bradley, whom he suspected, and unjustly, as it was afterwards discovered, of intriguing with his countess. The earl, who was of a very jealous and excitable temperament, had been residing in Scotland for a few months, and, on his sudden return, the sight of a young stranger kneeling

at the feet of his wife so incensed him, that, without waiting for further explanations, he immediately drew his sword and killed him on the spot. The shrieks of his wife brought the domestics to the room where this horrible tragedy had taken place, and it was then discovered that the supposed lover was Sir Charles Bradley, the younger brother of the countess, and who had that day, after an absence of several years, arrived at the mansion to solicit from his sister her influence with her husband in procuring some office in the state. The countess soon after died of grief, and smitten with remorse, the earl relinquished his seat, and spent the remainder of his life in town, leaving the relatives of the unfortunate victim to console themselves for the loss by the possession of the fine old hall, which was given over to the Bradley family in consideration of the deplorable circumstances of the death never being made public. The recollection of the calamity of which he had been the cause, it was supposed, brought on derangement; for the earl, from that period until his death, which occurred a few years afterwards was said to be haunted by a most singular apparition."

"An apparition!"

"Yes, and of the most remarkable kind. The apparition of a human head."

"*A human head!*" echoed Celestine, horror-stricken, as the peculiar circumstances of her own case were forced upon her mind.

"In no respect, as I have been told," continued Lord Walsingham, "resembling the features of the unfortunate young man who had been slain, but a grim and ghastly visage that struck terror into the hearts of all who saw it."

"All," repeated the opera-dancer, with a shudder; "then the earl was not the subject of a merely optical illusion, for there must have been some frightful reality in this phantom if likewise it was witnessed by others."

"So runneth the legend," observed the earl, quietly' "for it was said to have been frequently noticed by the entire household."

"True, you are but relating to me the family legend," said Celestine, now re-assured.

"Well, the earl, as I told you, died a few years after this sad event, and the spectre head was presumed to have disappeared with him; but, strange to say—for now comes the most remarkable part of my story—it continued to haunt his successor, the grandfather of the present earl, in the like manner."

"According to the tradition, of course!" exclaimed the opera-dancer, who, deeply interested in this recital, now breathlessly listened to its continuation.

"Yes, of course, according to the tradition," pursued the narrator, noticing with a smile the way in which he had worked upon her imagination. "But its appearance did not cease even then, for the earl's father frequently saw it before his death, and the present earl has not escaped its visitations."

"How horrible!" ejaculated the girl; "but he is no doubt convinced that this delusive fancy proceeds from some disordered condition of the brain, that medical skill could overcome."

"On the contrary, he believes firmly in its reality."

"And you——"

"A sceptic in all such matters, I have frequently tried to reason him out of the belief, but in vain. The circumstances that I have told you are well known to most of his friends, though, as you may conceive, the subject is one to which he is rarely known to allude; but, by a singular coincidence, on the very morning you favoured me with your company, it had formed the principal topic of our conversation."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Celestine, wondering at the same time in what way her visit could have any connection with the earl's delusion; "and may I inquire how I happen to be concerned in this?"

"Why, he then told me," resumed Walsingham, "that this Bradley Hall, the scene of the unfortunate event I related to you, had some time before passed into his hands from certain pecuniary advances made to the last owner by the former earl having remained unpaid. The dislike he naturally felt towards a place so intimately associated, as he fancied, with the spectral head that had so long haunted the family, caused him to entrust the entire management of the estate to an agent, who, it since appears, has taken advantage of the confidence reposed in him to appropriate some considerable sums to his own use."

"Still, my lord, I cannot perceive how I am involved in this matter."

"You shall see. The malady of the earl, for such I deem it to be, caused by the vivid recollection of his father's sufferings from the same visionary affliction, and the life of comparative seclusion he has himself led, is always certain to display itself after any disturbance of the mind; and on the evening of your *début* this illusion, which had for some time ceased to annoy him, returned with greater force than ever."

"On that evening!" gasped the opera-dancer, as again the remembrance of her own visitation occurred to her.

"On that evening," repeated Lord Walsingham, emphatically; "and the earl, after speaking of your own excellence in words of praise that you may be sure,' he added, with a slight bow, "were not displeasing to my ear, remarked to me how singular it was that the spectre of horror should be thus so curiously evoked by the presence of an image of loveliness. He had noticed, it seems, the peculiar features of some foreigner who was present, and the whole of the night afterwards he was haunted by the apparition of the head, with the expression of this remarkable physiognomy embodied in its shadowy outline."

"How incomprehensible is this mystery!" cried Celestine, communing rather with her own thoughts than uttering an observation intended to be heard, for she instinctively felt that the countenance must have been that of the Italian.

"Not at all," said Walsingham, in reply; for he misunderstood the cause of her perplexity; "the apparent wonder admits of easy explanation. The mind of the earl was excited; the remarkable features of the man he had seen, I dare say, produced an unusually strong impression; and on his return home he naturally mingled, as we do in dreams, that which he had really beheld with the characteristics of that which he only fancied that he saw."

"And do not the physicians attempt to dispel this singular belief?" asked Celestine.

"The earl is so averse to receiving medical opinions upon the subject, that he has declined every offer that has been made to him. Perhaps he feels it to be a weakness, and is afraid to confess it; or, confident of its reality, he may consider, as his father found it, that the best exertions of the faculty would be of no avail. However, having been lately admitted to his confidence in this respect, I recommended marriage as likely to be the most effectual cure; and as I began to be regarded by him as his best adviser, he had called upon me that morning to relate the new form which his ghostly visitant had taken."

"And this was the conversation that I presume I unfortunately interrupted?"

"Fortunately, my dear Celestine," corrected Walsingham; "for you—and now I have arrived at last at the point where your share in this strange story commences—came in most opportunely to dissipate the settled melancholy of my friend."

"And was so slight a cause sufficient?" exclaimed Celestine.

"A beautiful woman has been found before now as capable of exorcising ghosts as a priest," rejoined Walsingham with a smile; "and in this instance you prevailed more quickly. I need not tell you the pleasure which he felt at meeting you, the interest which he took in your conversation, and the hope he expressed of renewing the intimacy; but you have yet to learn that he attributes to you the cause of his being emancipated that day from the gloomy thoughts that were again gathering round him, and is anxiously desirous of testifying his obligations?"

"Surely, my lord, you are not in earnest? Obligations! and to me?"

"Nothing can be more seriously intended," replied the other; "he has desired me to call upon him this morning—partly, I know, to consult with me respecting the nefarious practices of his agent, and with which he has been just made acquainted; but chiefly, I am convinced, to consider the most delicate and suitable mode of presenting you with some substantial token of his esteem."

"And what have I done," responded the opera-dancer, "to merit such generosity? To be the object of his esteem alone is a sufficient reward to me for this slight benefit that I have unconsciously conferred; but unless," she added, lowering her glance, "this intimacy with yourself, my lord, should affect his good opinion, I will study to deserve it."

"Fear not for that, Celestine," assured the nobleman, winding his arm round her waist and straining her to his breast; "the secresy which you desire shall be implicitly preserved. None shall know the extent of our happiness, lest we excite envy as well as scandal. I will publicly announce my villa for sale—you shall become its purchaser—and by that means your scruples will be overcome, and your reputation still respected."

"Such an arrangement would indeed, my lord, be most agreeable to my inclinations; and if your own visits——"

"Were so timed as to escape the notice of the inquisitively disposed, I am to flatter myself they would not be unfavourably received," interrupted the nobleman significantly; "it shall be so," he continued, as he found a sanction for that supposition in the reciprocating smile of Celestine; "I will remove all but those domestics on whom I can rely to my seat in Devonshire, and the malicious world shall be silenced by a spell that shall throw a cloud of impenetrable mystery over our arrangements."

"You have now, indeed, entitled yourself to my gratitude as well as love," responded Celestine; "for though I hesitated not to yield my heart without a stronger tie than that of affection to bind us, I am no proof against the censorious judgment of those who might ascribe my conduct to different motives. You, my dear Walsingham, have relieved me from the only dread I had, and now I can wholly resign myself to you, without a fear that by so doing I may become exposed to a notoriety that terrifies me even to think of."

The conversation was here suspended by the arrival of Madame Romani, who, being in the confidence of both, was not felt to be an intruder, and the warmth of their mutual passion was consequently little restrained by her presence. The dinner-hour following soon afterwards, the three formed an agreeable party among themselves, and it was only when the lateness of the hour reminded him that he could not longer with propriety, postpone his visit to the earl, that Lord Walsingham tore himself away from the fascinating society of the opera dancer. The vocalist then bade farewell also to her friend; and when the departure of her guests relieved her from the necessity of sustaining the flow of spirits that she had hitherto kept up with unflagging buoyancy, Celestine felt an ominous depression resting upon her mind, and she was admonished of the approach of that hour when she was to meet the man who had adopted means so singular to obtain an interview.

Changing her dress to one less likely to attract observation, and nerving herself for the adventure before her, the opera-dancer now pursued her way to the spot appointed for the assignation in the Regent's Park.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ITALIAN.

THOSE who have ever struck aside from Holborn into Leather Lane, a street exhibiting in its busy out-of-door traffic so marked a contrast to the air of prim gentility which characterises Hatton Garden, though the two thoroughfares run closely parallel with one another, can hardly fail to have noticed the peculiar characteristics of a region that has for the last century been the chosen refuge of the lower class of emigrants, and the favourite haunt of those vagrant Savoyards who gain a precarious subsistence by grinding barrel-organs through the metropolis from sunrise till sundown.

The courts and alleys leading out of this narrow street, the miserable tenements at the back of Mutton Hill, the squalid holes about Baldwin's Gardens, and the wretched nooks, designated "buildings," that need only a glance into their filthy recesses to cause a timorous pedestrian to recoil from exploring further, constitute the nucleus of a colony which, from the lower part of Gray's Inn Lane to the boundary of that uneven district formed by the junction of Saffron Hill with Coppice Row, is almost unknown, though it contributes no inconsiderable portion to the bulk of the population resident within the parochial limits.

Appearing with the daylight, and astir with the earliest indications of the morning traffic, there may be first seen issuing forth from the obscure corners where they have passed the night, and radiating from this spot in all directions, troops of itinerant organists, slowly marching forth. Differing only in age and size, thence they go, each with his organ strapped upon his back, his staff in hand, his flapping hat upon his head, and the familiar jacket and muddy trousers hanging heavily over a pair of large gaping boots, wending their way to some distant part of the suburbs. Another hour, and they will be succeeded by the image boys, bearing away on their heads those trays of busts and statuettes that have been fabricated by the modeller on the day before. Then will follow, in desultory succession, bands of street musicians, venders of Birmingham goods, sellers of cheap earthenware, dealers in broken clocks and umbrellas, piemen who have concocted greasy imitations of savoury patties, coster-

mongers of every kind and every grade, and specimens of those indescribable traders about the pavement who speculate in stale fruit or fish, accordingly as the season influences the demand for those commodities.

It will be therefore seen that this locality is the focus of those scattered rays of itinerant life that penetrate at various periods of the day into every portion of the streets of London, giving a distinct character to its thoroughfares, and colouring, as it were, the stream of daily traffic with the motley hues of metropolitan vagabondism.

There is one quarter of this remarkable locality that is inhabited almost exclusively by the modellers, the image-vendors, and the barrel-organ proprietors and their slaves—the wretched boys who, by an iniquitous system of oppression, are brought over annually from abroad to feed the gains of their sordid taskmaster or *padrone*. Of the horrors of this servitude, the helpless dependence upon their employer, the cruel treatment they experience, the privations to which they are subjected, the utter hopelessness of their lot, and of that crushing consciousness of expatriation that yields no glimmer of hope for the future, no cheering anticipation that they will return to the land of their birth, the public have hitherto known but little, except through a casual revelation from the police-court. Should the veil ever be torn aside from the scenes that are still daily enacted, despite the existence of a society formed expressly for their suppression, there will be an exposition of systematic cruelty and remorseless tyranny on the part of these traders in humanity, that shall make the barbarous practices of the slavers on the Guinea coast seem deeds of chivalrous heroism by comparison.

In this quarter are the lodging-houses, ruinous and dilapidated as they most of them are, all huddled together in wretched proximity, with nothing but a narrow, ill-paved causeway, to afford space between them for the passage of a current of air. In the centre of this pavement is a narrow gutter, terminating in the street beyond, and there discharging the refuse filth that is thrown into its reeking channel. In this abominable court are the dens situated where the principal speculators in this nefarious traffic reside. Here are the thrones of those minor despots who, claiming the right of proprietorship alike in the Savoyard and the instrument with which he is entrusted, take care to exact the utmost profit from both. Allowed only a scanty sum for his own use, the Italian boy is expected to give up the whole produce of the organ to its owner; and should this at any time fail to reach a specified amount, stripes and starvation form the punishment in consequence. The lofts allotted to them as dormitories are low in the roof, and badly ventilated, and these are always crowded, twenty being generally considered the number capable of finding sleeping room within their confined limits The coarse hard beds are stretched in rows along the floor and hither, after the weary wanderings of the day, do the nomadic minstrels, who have trudged for miles through the rain and mire, come to obtain their nightly rest. Those who possess, by purchase or otherwise, an instrument of their own, are, of course, at liberty to locate themselves as they like, and the bed-rooms they occupy are, in consideration of their independent condition, fitted up with some show of comfort; but the remainder—those unfortunates who, for a certain length of time, are bound to obey the dictates of that man who brought them over—are first called up to render an account of the day's earnings, then searched, to prevent the possibility of their concealing any portion, and at last dispatched to their mattresses to dispose of themselves as they best can.

With a fair share of that nervous irritation which every body must have felt, more or less, when the performance of the street musician sounds harshly to the ear, and the harmony becomes discord, and its vicinity an annoyance, we would yet fain put in a plea for these intruders on our moments of meditative tranquillity. They help to soften the asperities of life among those who most need the solace, and give those who have not too many sources of harmless entertainment the means of listening to a strain that, to ears less highly wrought to acute perception, may "discourse most eloquent music." The poor woman, who, to amuse her children, purchases for a trifling gratuity the jangling efforts of the itinerant organ-grinder, would hardly feel greater pleasure if the whole orchestra of the Italian Opera had condescended to play before her door for the same sum. There is, besides, some credit due to them for the share they have, slight though it may be, in fixing and encouraging a musical taste among the people. By popularising the melodies of our composers they unconsciously foster the love of the art, and generate a consequent desire to hear those very compositions better performed. Even if it were only for the revival of those pleasant associations of the olden time to which they occasionally give rise, freshening our recollections of some opera we may have heard, or arousing certain memories of the past connected with the gay festivities of the ball-room, they cannot be altogether considered unworthy of toleration. The suggestive influences of some familiar tune coming athwart us in the midst of our avocations may perhaps divert the mind from subjects of greater importance, but there is a responsive chord often struck upon those feelings that lie beneath the surface, which will awaken many sympathies worthy of being cherished, and turn the thoughts back to companions of happy days, that in the constant excitement of business are apt to be too easily forsaken and forgotten.

The front parlour of one of these lodging-houses, or "barracks," as they are called by the fraternity, is generally used as a kind of reception-room for the various inmates; and though but scantily furnished, and moderate enough in size, is regarded as a most luxurious apartment to those who seldom venture within its walls, excepting on that day in the week which gives them the boon of a cessation from their labour. On the other side of the passage is the kitchen, a dark and gloomy retreat, with a long deal table, extending from one end of the room to the other, and fitted up with rough wooden benches, for the accommodation of those who here take their meals. A tolerably large range, with a fire always kept up within it, a boiler steaming away with the hot water constantly ready for the breakfast and supper of the lodgers, and a low window, with only a few panes of glass unbroken, and the rest of the divisions patched up with paper, make up the principal features of the place.

In this primitive refectory assemble most of the foreign members of that class of itinerant musicians with whom the indwellers of London have been long familiar. The poor idiot boy who grinds with zealous industry an empty organ, and flings himself into contortions of wild delight at the occasional twang that rewards his energies after moments of violent exertion, here becomes the butt for the jests of others. The odd-looking German who goes about with a string of

dressed-up dancing dogs, and incites them to activity by blowing doleful notes ont of a flageolet whistle, here terminates the round of his daily wanderings; and the whole tribe of Savoyards who, with white mice, marmosets, and monkeys, add zoological attractions to those of music, throng the room after nightfall in noisy nnmbers.

About the same time that Celestine received the visit of Lord Walsingham, an interview took place in this apartment of a very different nature, and between two parties of a very different description. As the whole of the lodgers had gone ont on their usual mission, the only occupants of the room were the landlord and his visitor who had just entered, and to these it is now necessary that we should direct onr attention.

The first was a coarse, vulgar-looking man, who, in his capacity of master of the establishment, had stationed himself before the fire and beguiled his solitnde by having freqnent recourse to a pewter tankard that was simmering on the hob, and contained a compound of beer, sweetened and spiced, and strengthened by the admixture of certain potent spirits. He was a native of Piedmont, and, though long a resident in town, the first look at the man wonld have satisfied the most inexperienced in physiognomical deductions that he was both a foreigner by birth and a knave by profession.

Antonio Borelli—for snch was the name he bore—had sundry marked characteristics in his countenance that could not readily be mistaken. Rather under the middle size in figure, he had broad rounded shoulders and a full muscular development of body. His head was bullet-shaped, with a crest of stubble-like red hair that was abont as pliant as wire, and no more. Underneath a low receding forehead were a pair of light grey eyes, rolling about with an infinite amount of roguery in them; a short, snnbby nose; a chin slightly projecting, and encircled by a beard of some days' growth; whilst his age, though somewhat difficult to guess at, might be considered near forty. He had a dress that, beyond its worn and dingy appearance, exhibited nothing remarkably obtrusive about it; bnt in one of the pockets of the coarse gabardine that he had assumed as a sort of dressing-gown there was seen the handle of a short whip thrust forth, which sufficiently indicated his readiness to inflict corporeal chastisement on those he held in bondage, should the sum he anticipated on their retnrn not be forthcoming.

On the other side of the fireplace was seated an Italian, whose swarthy, olive complexion, dark eyes, and thick bushy eyebrows, heightened the natnrally fierce and vindictive expression of his features. His hair, of an intense black, was arranged in full wavy masses; and though the period of life that he had attained was not evinced by the peculiarities described, it was perceptible, on a closer inspection, that artificial aids had been resorted to, for the purpose of imparting an appearance of greater jnvenility, since the deep furrows of his face showed that he was at least ten years older than the man before him. His costume was respectable, and even with some pretensions to fashion, the continental character being, however, preserved in its style.

On the arrival of his visitor, Borelli had not moved from his seat, but simply waving his hand for the door to be closed, and adding an intimation that they were alone in the house, he refreshed himself with a draught from the tankard, and awaited a communication that he evidently expected.

"Well, Antonio," said the Italian, resuming the conversation after the few preliminary words of introduction had been exchanged, "I told yon that the girl was the same that I suspected her to be, and now I want to know if you are ready to carry ont the project we had in contemplation respecting her?"

"Humph!" moodily responded the other, in a hoarse guttural voice, "I must first know whether you are right, and how you come to make so certain of it."

"Psha! what doubt can there be about the matter? I told you, when we met at the gambling-rooms at Strasburg, that I had, at last, got a trace of the pretty decoy duck that I had taken so much trouble to get into my clntches; and once having learned that this Madame Romani, the famous singer, was the lady that ran away with her, I have followed pretty closely on their track ever since."

"Ha! that was an odd freak of yours," observed Antonio; "there are few who would have taken the pains that yon did to get hold of a child like that, or having once done so, they would have managed matters more cleverly than to let the bird they had ensnared slip out of the cage."

"And what fault was it of mine?" returned the Italian, leaning his arm on the table and bending over towards his companion; "twelve years ago, when we were both prowling abont the streets of Naples, without a scudo to bless ourselves, did I not tell you that the little blue-eyed girl we used to see playing within the walls of the bnilding where the orphans are placed would make our fortunes, if we could only steal her quietly away from the asylum? Did I not devise the means, and, under the pretence of soliciting alms from the principal, get access to the garden, and lure my damsel out from the gateway at dusk by telling her that I would take her to her father, who, I said, was still living? Was not the money we made by the little simpleton on the road sufficient to show that I was right in my expectation of getting enough from the soft-hearted to save our heads the tronble of thinking about the fnture; and who spoiled all this beautiful game but the fellow who grew so confoundedly impatient after the money, that, at the very first house we stopped at on our way to Florence, he must needs steal the silver plate of mine host and compel me to shift for myself as I best could, before a hue and cry was raised after the plunder?"

"Well," growled Borelli, in reply, "and who the devil could have let such a prize slip through his fingers? There were you, with the child, feasting away in the house, whilst I was taking my turn at the roadside, to watch the travellers coming in, and when I saw the landlord, who had been brushing np his plate for the next guests, leave the bar, and let the spoons stand all alone on the shelves, shining in the sun, what the dence could a poor fellow do but slide his arm through the window and hop off with them?"

"Yes, and a small chance should I have had of getting safe off from the consequences, if I hadn't seen you do it, and made my bow to the innkeeper before it was found ont. I loitered about the place till night, hoping to see the girl turned into the road again, but, as ill-luck would have it, the first travellers picked her up, and you had been just as qnick as she was in running away from your old comrade."

"Well, you must admit it turned out best for both of us, after all," rejoined Antonio, surlily; "I got a decent living ont of the chances of the road till I declared on to the gaming-tables, and helped the flats to get rid of their fortunes by making mine; whilst yon, with a better show of speech and manner than I had, managed to wheedle an old uncle of yours into recom-

mending you as a courier to a family. A nice picking you got out of them, I'll swear."

"Yes, I recollect how you stared, as well you might, when you saw me at Strasburg in high feather, and learned that I was the courier to Lord Walsingham."

"A nobleman whom you left, I believe, under rather peculiar circumstances?" added Borelli, slily.

"His lordship certainly missed a few valuables which he had entrusted to my safe keeping," said the Italian jocosely in reply; "and we had some words about it, but I shall square my account with him yet. He gave me a blow that will have to be repaid with interest. However, my connection with his lordship happened to just give me the very clue I wanted."

"How! was it then through his means that you caught a glimpse of the girl again? Let me hear that story, for it will be new to me."

"You must know, then," pursued the Italian, "that this young nobleman, the Lord Walsingham, in whose suite I had the impudence and good luck to get, was passionately fond of music and dancing, and the first place he ever visited in the towns we came to was always the opera. Whilst at Milan, a new dancer made her appearance, and, as usual, off his lordship goes to see her. As I had the office of purchasing the tickets, of course I took care to get one for myself at the same time."

"To be sure," assented Borelli; "if the English will have foreign servants about them, let them pay for it."

"The place was crowded," resumed the other, "but I managed to push my way down to the front of the orchestra, when judge my surprise as I discovered that the new star of the ballet which that evening burst forth was none other than the very girl I had stolen away from Naples."

"That is, you fancied that she was?"

"It was not fancy, but a firm conviction of her being the same, that led me to consider her so," answered the narrator. "A few nights afterwards, Lord Walsingham, who began, I suppose, to be struck by her beauty, went again, and the second time, as I fixed my eyes intently on the features of the girl, I became more than ever certain that I could recognise them, and, as I then thought, that the recognition was mutual. To make short my story, his lordship took it into his head to follow her wherever she went, and as, in every theatre he visited, I always contrived to fix myself as near the stage as possible, I had repeated opportunities of proving the truth of what I suspected."

"And that was at the time we also met again and renewed our old acquaintanceship."

"Precisely so. I began to make inquiries—found that Madame Romani was the person who had brought her out, and who, as report went, had even been at the expense of educating her for that profession. I pushed my investigations further, and, by feigning an attachment to her waiting-woman, I learned that this girl had been an orphan—that she had been under the care of this Madame Romani from an early age—that her real name was unknown—and, in short, gathered all the particulars that I wanted from that source, and which corroborated the belief I first entertained."

"Well, what happened then?"

"The chain of incidents made me now consider whether the discovery I had made could be turned to any advantage, and I soon calculated the way in which I should gain the greatest profit. I dropped my character of courier, for reasons that you know, and came to England, having heard that London was to be the place for the next appearance of my old companion."

"Where, in the meantime, Antonio Borelli, another of your old companions, had established himself as a Savoyard's *padrone*, and become proprietor of a first-rate lodging-house," interrupted the Piedmontese, with a glance of satisfaction at himself, and a renewed application to the beverage of his choice.

"I know you would never give up a chance," said the Italian, significantly; "and if one line of knavery didn't answer, you did right to turn rogue in another; but I have not yet come to the end of my story."

"You are sure, then, that she is the same?"

"Let this convince you: on the first night of her appearance here I clapped on my best suit, and posted off to the stalls of the opera, knowing that I should manage to clear my expenses by a little of my old dexterity in diving into the pockets of those about me. I saw her looking more beautiful, and dancing with as much grace as ever, and wanting first of all to try whether she would be weak enough to give me a hope of working on her mind effectually, I hurriedly pencilled a short note to say that if she felt inclined to meet one who had to gratify an ardent desire for revenge, she must place a certain token in her hair. This note I succeeded in throwing into her carriage unobserved."

"Why not have gammoned her that you wanted money, or that you were a swell that felt a sort of love for her?"

"Because, had I done so I should have failed to accomplish what I wished. I wanted to make my reason for seeing her as little suspected as possible, and to do this I knew I must have recourse to a story of that romance and mystery that would set her imagination at work. Well, it had the desired effect. Last night I saw the signal I had proposed. I made an appointment to meet her in a certain spot this evening; and as now you know all that has taken place up to this moment, I wish to learn if you intend keeping to the old promise you made me, and giving the assistance to my project that I want?"

"Which I suppose is the same that you hinted to me the other day? I am to swear that you are her father?"

"Just so; and with the plausible story I told you, and that I had invented for the purpose, who would believe otherwise?"

"But I must first know," said Borelli, "more of the scheme you have got in that busy head of yours, before I consent to be your witness in this affair. You have offered me fairly, I admit,—but what, in the name of all the saints, do you intend doing with the girl after you have claimed her as your child?"

"Then, if I must satisfy your infernal inquisitiveness, let this make your mind easy," answered his companion. "I risked enough to get hold of her when a child; for the pretty-looking face she had, and which I made the key to unlock the purse-strings of the benevolent, was a safe capital to trade upon. Well, this very face I intend to make my banker for the future, and, in fact, make it yield me, from time to time, just as much money as I may choose to spend. Do you understand me now?"

"Humph!" rejoined the other, "I think I have got some idea of your plan. By establishing the supposed claim you have upon her, you think to get, either by threats or persuasion, a regular allowance, to prevent your being troublesome—eh?"

"Better than that," was the reply; "I shall make her draw some wealthy fool or other into a snare that I can find a way to turn to a pretty profitable account. But enough of this," he added, with an oath. "I am not going to let you into the whole secret; so tell me at once whether you will agree to take what I offered, and do what I want; or am I to take myself and my money elsewhere?"

"You would seek far before you found one who answered your purpose better," cried Borelli; "and now listen to me. I am ready to swear, if necessary, that the girl is yours; that I was with you when you got the child received into the asylum as an orphan; and that you removed her as you did because you had no means of providing for her till then, and felt a dislike to confess the trick you had played in getting her thus taken care of during her youth. Well, all this, with the rest of the lesson you wrote down for me, and that I shall get by heart against it's wanted, shall be done; and now I want to know, in my turn, if you have forgotten a certain proposal of my own, and which I spoke to you about at the same time?"

"What the little affair at Lord Walsingham's?"

"To be sure. You tell me that you owe his lordship a grudge for old scores, and this will give you a capital opportunity for rubbing them off. You can have revenge on him and benefit yourself together."

"It is rather out of my way," said the Italian, hesitatingly, "and with any other man I should give up the idea of it at once; but there are reasons in this case that urge me to enter into the matter you propose. Why, however, was I selected to be the one to run all the danger?"

"Danger!" returned Borelli, with a sneer; "you seem to have grown mighty careful of yourself since you have come back to London, and turned swell-mobsman on your own account! I remember the time when you thought cutting a traveller's throat the shortest way to his pockets; but I suppose, since you have been a courier, you have got too respectable for any thing else but a quiet swindle in a billiard-room, or a sly touch at pocket-picking under the Quadrant."

"You know my temper," said the other, with a fierce look, "and had better not ruffle it. Answer my question, and leave me to act as I think proper."

"No need of ill words between old comrades," rejoined Antonio, proffering what remained of the liquor; "for you and I to have a fall out would be to show no wisdom on either side, so if I have angered you by what I said, I am sorry for it, and there's an end. Now to business. You guessed, of course, that when I went into this line and bought the stock in trade of my predecessor, I had some other object in view than the mere letting out of the trumpery organs, and the profits brought back by the knaves I have got with me."

"You told me so when we first met," answered the Italian, impatiently, "and that you had a regular understanding with a certain gang to furnish information of those houses that would repay them for forcing an entry, but what has that to do with the present job?"

"Every thing," was the rejoinder; "it was through that very circumstance I got hold of the intelligence I mentioned to you."

"Indeed!" ejaculated his hearer, again drawing himself nearer the padrone.

"Why, if it wasn't for us there wouldn't be half, the cribs cracked that there are," continued Borelli, using the jargon of his craft. "When I want to know the places that would answer their purpose, I set my boy Jacopo to work, and a knowing one he is. He makes it his business to go round into the suburbs, and see those houses that have got plenty of furniture and plate inside, and then he tells me how many men are likely to be there to protect it. He gets into the gardens, you see, and whilst he is grinding his organ and dancing to the children that come clustering about the windows, he keeps his eyes on the fastenings, and sees how the shutters are secured, and what sort of folks they are. If he says the thing is worth while, I have got a woman with china to go round after him, and take the impression of the locks in wax whilst she is bargaining with the servants for old clothes in exchange; and then a clever cracksman does the business, and I go halves in the booty."

"And this lad, then, has put you up to the very scheme we have been talking about—eh?" pursued the Italian, interrogatively.

"To be sure he has; and instead of doing as I have done before, he had no sooner mentioned the name of the nobleman it belonged to, than it struck me after you had gone that you would like to have a share in this chance yourself, and that we could then keep the secret quiet between us?"

"And the valuables, I suppose, are to be easily carried off?"

"The thing can be done almost blindfold," said Borelli; "Jacopo, who by the way is the only one I trust in this line, for the rest are so stupid or so scrupulous that I can't make them understand, has told me that when once you get through the gates that are down a turning from the Fulham road, the rest of the work is easy. The windows open on to the lawn, and in the very first room you get into, there is enough to pay a fellow for the trouble he takes, if he goes no further. You see it is a sort of thing I can't very well undertake myself, for I am obliged to remain here at night to keep matters straight in my own way."

"So that you want me to manage the whole of it, without assistance?"

"Why, you can have Jacopo with you, if you like; but if any of the gang I am doing business with happen to know it, the affair will be blown, and I shall very likely get into some trouble with them in consequence."

"Enough," answered the Italian, after a pause; "I will do it, and alone. You were right to keep it to ourselves. I see the way to make this prove a rare harvest for both of us. Is the establishment of Lord Walsingham at present numerous?"

"You shall learn that from the boy's own lips," replied Borelli: "he hasn't gone on his beat to-day, for I wanted him in another quarter, and I expect his return every minute. But this much I can tell you, that if we let a few days go over the servants may be less, but it's a chance if the booty don't get smaller too, for there is some talk, I hear, of his lordship going down to his country seat in Devonshire."

"It shall be done at once," returned the other; "the night after to-morrow at the farthest."

"Well, I am glad to see you feel so warm about it, after all; and now we have made matters pleasant and comfortable in that way, I should not be thought very curious, I suppose, if I asked the name you patronise just now—for I shouldn't wonder if you found the old one was not exactly suited to your complexion?"

"You are right there," muttered the Italian; "but it signifies little what you choose to call me, only

forget not that I am the same Pietro Bazzini that left the girl at Naples; and, now you have raised the question, I may tell you that such is the name I have used since I began a new life as a courier."

The padrone was about to reply, when there was an interruption caused by the arrival of Jacopo, the organ-boy spoken of by Borelli, and who was a short, sinister-visaged lad that looked about fifteen, but might have been much older. He had all the signs of habitual knavery stamped upon his countenance, and, as he entered with a slouching gait and a careless swaying of his body to and fro, the Italian saw in one rapid glance of his quick eye how completely, under an assumption of stupidity and indifference, the boy contrived to veil his crafty penetration and observant cunning. Depositing a small bundle on the table, and replying to the inquiring look of his employer, with a few words uttered in a coarse *patois* unintelligible to Bazzini, he drew a low stool near the fire, and applied himself to a close scrutiny of the Italian, whilst he pretended to feel an interest only in the contents of the pewter measure before him.

"You see we have a pretty regular way of doing business," observed Borelli, turning to his companion, and unfastening the parcel that had been brought. "This is my share of the two last little matters we have been engaged in together. There," he added, a gleam of satisfaction lighting up his countenance as he displayed from the bundle a varied assortment of such miscellaneous articles as are found in the drawing-rooms of the wealthy, and consisting of time-pieces, vases, jewellery, and nic-nacs generally, "my men have not been idle yesterday. I trust to their honour to make a fair division of the spoil, for they know how useful I am to them—that is, I and Jacopo, my little jackall, as I call him; for I couldn't manage half so well without him."

The organ-boy, thus drawn into the conversation, grinned an acknowledgment of the compliment; and readily responding to the permission given by Borelli, opened a cupboard adjoining, and drew from one of the shelves a plate of bread and dried fish, on which he commenced making a hearty meal.

A few words of encouragement from the padrone then led the boy to enter into a lengthened detail of those particulars to which Borelli had alluded. He explained that from various visits he had made to the mansion of Lord Walsingham, for the express purpose of noting the best way in which an entry could be effected, he had found that the place was left almost unprotected; that Lord Walsingham was rarely at his villa until a late hour, and those nights that he was away a butler and some female servants were the only persons left in the house. The lad further stated that in the front apartments, that opened on to the lawn, he had observed a considerable quantity of plate and other valuables placed upon a sideboard, and that it would not be difficult to obtain these by forcing a pane of glass out of one of the windows, and detaching the fastenings of the shutters. The great gates were locked after dusk, he said, but concealment in the garden might be easily managed until the time of entering the building.

Possessed of this information, and agreeing to the proposition made by Borelli, the Italian shortly after rose to take his leave, with a promise that on the following day, at the same hour, he would return to complete certain arrangements that were necessary to the future proceedings of both parties. A rough farewell was given by the Piedmontese, and, with no alteration in that heavy, lumbering manner with which he cloaked his sly acuteness, the boy moved uncouthly towards the door, and with a gesture of significance removed the fastening, and uttered a short adieu as he left the passage clear for Bazzini's egress.

It was now three in the afternoon, and there was an interval of five hours, consequently, before the period arrived for him to meet the opera-dancer, against whom he had been plotting this diabolical scheme of deception. To wile away the intervening time, he resolved to visit the billiard-rooms in Regent Street, where he had been engaged first of all as a marker, and when afterwards admitted into the confidence of the proprietor, as a recognised sharper, to assist in the plunder of the unwary. With this resolve to employ himself profitably in the interim, he quitted the region where his old associate was located, and escaping from the maze of courts and alleys by which the scene of his late interview was surrounded, he made his way into Holborn, and thence proceeded direct to the West-end.

Having found the billiard-rooms deserted, as the hour was too early for the frequenters, he lounged, instead, through Piccadilly, with the intention of crossing into the Green Park, and thence returning by a circuitous route to his lodgings in Soho. As he was brooding, with a firm confidence in his success, over the plan that he had formed respecting Celestine, the door of a mansion near him was violently closed, and a man, muttering savage imprecations whilst he descended the steps, brushed hurriedly past. The rapidity with which the person so unceremoniously ejected left the house prevented the Italian from noticing his features; but as a glove was dropped by him on the pavement in his haste, he hurried after the loser to restore an article that was too trifling to be withheld, and with this he overtook him a few paces off.

The nature of the loss had not been communicated an instant, before, to his surprise, the person he addressed turned round, with a mingled expression of wonderment and pleasure, and exclaimed:

"I cannot be mistaken surely; it is Bazzini—he who was in the service of Lord Walsingham, as his courier, four years ago?"

"I remember you now—Mr. Jarvis, I believe," replied the Italian, with a searching glance at his newly found acquaintance, as if to read the thoughts that were passing in his mind; "I have a recollection, too, of a curious incident that took place at our last meeting abroad, when——"

"Hush!" interposed the agent quickly, for it was the same man who had so comfortably established himself at Bradley Hall, during his brief visit; "we are here too much exposed to observation. Let us retire to the nearest tavern; I have that to say to you which is as well not overheard."

"As you please," cried Bazzini; and falling in with the pace of his companion, he accompanied him to a public-house that stood in a bye-street adjoining, and passing up into a room above, where there seemed no prospect of intrusion, Jarvis called for wine and biscuits, and the two began to enter into a deep and earnest conversation.

"It would seem as if the fiend had heard me," resumed Jarvis, referring to the accident that had brought them together; "for at the very time you came up, I was wishing for just such a man as I know you to be—bold, resolute, and not to be daunted by trifling obstacles."

"In that last respect, not unlike another that I have had some dealings with," returned the Italian,

determined to strengthen the advantage he had by every means in his power. "It is a curious mistake for one traveller to enter another traveller's room, and accidentally be caught opening another traveller's writing-desk with false keys, and by which means certain letters and papers found their way, of course by mistake, into the other traveller's pocket."

"Well," said Jarvis, somewhat disconcerted, "there is no occasion for disguising the matter. I did go into your master's room for that purpose; and I bought, and I believe secured, your secresy, for I have heard no more of the subject since. We came to a quick understanding about it; and if certain letters sent by the Earl of Winterton to Lord Walsingham did find their way into my possession, and have since been supposed to be lost, you, I know, my good fellow, would admit that I ought to be thoroughly acquainted with all the arrangements of the earl, whose agent I was, and that nothing should transpire without it coming to my knowledge, even if I was not exactly particular in the way my information was got."

"It was hardly worth the trouble of coming from London to Paris to get, was it?" cried the Italian, in an ironical tone of inquiry. "But however, to make a clear conscience between us, it may be as well for you to know that you are not much in my debt, for I left his lordship myself the next day, and by a similar accident also took away a few trifles that have prevented my having the honour of a personal acquaintance with him since."

"Ha!" responded the other, breathing more freely, "I began to guess as much, but you have so completely disguised yourself that I should not have known you, only for your voice."

"Perhaps it would make both of us more comfortable if we left off talking about the past," interrupted Bazzini, "and looked only to the service we can be to each other now; for to judge from what you have said, it would seem that I can be useful to you; and to speak the truth, you look worried and anxious enough to make me think you have got some desperate design in contemplation."

"You are right there," returned Jarvis, "and if I was certain that I might place reliance on you——"

"Doubt it not; I can perhaps be more useful to you than you imagine," added the Italian; "if, as I sus-

pect from what I saw and heard, yon have been ill-treated in the house I noticed yon come ont of as I passed, let me know the vengeance you would have, and it shall be taken."

"Vengeance!" echoed the agent; "I would have the most complete and deadly revenge upon the man who has betrayed me that imagination can conceive. I would show him no mercy; he should suffer the most agonising tortnre that the ingennity of mankind could inflict; and even then my hatred would be but partly gratified. Is it a dream, Bazzini, or did you once speak to me of a poison so subtle, so impossible to be detected, that, once infused into the system, it should wear away the life of a man almost imperceptibly, and leave no proofs of its virulence behind?"

And as this was said he bent forwards eagerly towards his companion.

"I did once speak to yon of such a compound," rejoined the Italian, "and that I possessed the secret; but it was when you yonrself tnrned the conversation upon the subject, and from no wish of mine to be the administrator of it."

"I would have this fatal instrument in my power," muttered Jarvis, as he drank with furious rapidity the wine he kept ponring out to allay his nervons excitement; "I have been this day threatened, exposed, insulted beyond endurance; compelled to give up the honest perquisites of my calling, and dismissed with a contemptuous disbelief of all I had to utter in my defence; bnt I will have a full revenge for this,—a glorious vengeance," he continued, in a voice bursting with rage and passionate vexation, "that shall be my recompense for all."

"But, as the Earl of Winterton's agent," observed the Italian, interrogatively, "you are yet capable of accomplishing all you have in contemplation, without my aid?"

"It was from his house I was expelled, and by the earl's orders," exclaimed Jarvis savagely, and losing all command over himself in the recollection of the treatment he had experienced, and the enraged feelings that it had inspired. "I will hunt him to the earth," he continued in a similar torrent of invective; "bnt I know the man who acted as his informant, and who preceded me in my visit, and bitterly shall he rne the day that he first crossed me in my path. I had that moment you spoke to me been wishing for a help to rid me of him, and now, as if in answer to my prayer, yon rise before me."

"And in this instance, perhaps, I may disappoint your expectations," retnrned the Italian with less manifestation of readiness; "I thought at first Lord Walsingham was the object of your hatred, not one of whom I know nothing, and abont whom I care nothing."

"I will pay you well; you shall have whatever recompense yon desire," cried Jarvis eagerly, "if you will bnt assist me in this. I know you can; I have need of one like yon; and if gold will buy yonr aid, yon shall have enough to satisfy yonr most exorbitant demand."

"Bnt you are now too much excited and agitated by feelings that may soon subside. It is possible that in the fntnre moments of cool reflection yon might repent of this violent determination," said the Italian, in reply; "and then throw upon my shonlders the responsibility of that deed of which you would make me the instrument."

"Never!" exclaimed the agent; "I am resolved· I will have the most complete and effectual revenge. At the very minute I had hoped to grasp my reward of years, he has snddenly snatched it from me. Nothing shall alter my resolution; as I think to-day, so shall I think to-morrow; and years, if they could pass without yielding me the revenge I seek, should find me as firm and implacable as now."

The speaker, thus giving vent to the expression of the inveterate hatred that he felt, here clutched his fingers together in the nervons intensity of his passion, and with snch convnlsive force was this done, that the wine-glass he held between them was shivered into pieces, and his hand was cut and scarred with the broken fragments. But even the most acute pain would have been unfelt by him whilst the vindictive spirit by which he was influenced still exerted its power. His entire natnre seemed changed. He was no longer the crafty hypocrite that sought to veil his diabolical machinations under a smooth and plausible exterior. His thirst for vengeance had in an instant dissipated his usnal cunning, and as he now sat looking across the table with an anxious glance directed towards Bazzini, it seemed as if his features had caught, like the reflection of a mirror, the stern and settled murderous scowl that was continnally visible on the face of the Italian.

"This is a dangerons business you want me to engage in," observed his companion, as he re-filled his glass with cool deliberation and disposed of its contents; "and it isn't altogether the money yon offer that would tempt me to do it. All that I am likely to require of that I know how to get and where to get without yonr pnrse being a shilling the lighter."

"Then yon will not give me the help that I wanted," muttered Jarvis, his lips quivering with rage, and his tone betraying the disappointment that he felt; "but remember that yon dare not utter a word of what I have spoken to you—your own safety is as deeply implicated in this matter as mine, and if hereafter you are foolish enough to breathe a syllable respecting my character, forget not that you are yourself in danger of the law."

"Tush!" ejaculated Bazzini; "you need not be afraid that I shall ever speak of it. I have enough work on my own hands without meddling with that of others. But the case is not altogether so desperate as you seem to imagine. Though money is not the great temptation with me, I think you could make other terms in addition which I might accept."

"Name them—what is it—what do you reqnire?" exclaimed the agent with eagerness, his eyes sparkling with the hope of accomplishing his object.

"First, I should like to know the contents of those letters that you displayed so mnch anxiety to learn and ran so many risks to gain?"

"Those letters!" echoed the agent, surprised at the allusion of the Italian; "what interest can they have for you?"

"It remains to be seen," answered Bazzini, qnietly; "perhaps mere curiosity—perhaps some other motive makes me ask respecting them. At all events it suits my purpose to know, and that is a sufficient reason for yon."

"Well," rejoined Jarvis, reluctantly, "they bore reference only to some peculiar arrangements that were then being concluded between the earl and Lord Walsingham, and were of no consequence to other persons at all."

"And do yon imagine that I should be weak enough to believe this?" added the Italian, dwelling on each word, and looking fixedly at the shrinking countenance of the agent; "do you think to cheat me with a lie

so palpable and transparent as this? Would you have me believe that you would take the trouble of following Lord Walsingham so far—choosing an apartment next his own, having a key fabricated to fit the lock of his desk, and hazarding the chance of a discovery that would have convicted you of being a trespasser and a thief, merely to obtain correspondence that was of no value to yourself? No, no," continued Bazzini, with an incredulous sneer; "people are not apt to do all this without having a sufficient reason for it."

"And you persist in seeking into the motive I had for this?"

"Most assuredly," was the reply. "What you told me when I discovered you at this work, and when I convinced you that it was of no use disguising the thing from me, answered well enough at the time, but now I have certain notions of my own which urge me to inquire further."

"I cannot, will not divulge their contents," declared Jarvis, in an emphatic tone of remonstrance; "with the possession of the earl's secret, that fell by those means into my keeping, is associated the only power I now hold over him, and I will not share with another the means of acquiring an ascendancy over the earl's actions, which I need myself, and which must restore to me the position that I have lost."

"Then, as yet, the earl knows not that you have those documents in your possession?" asked the Italian.

"Not only is he unaware of their falling into my hands, but he even believes that Lord Walsingham, to whom they were entrusted for the purpose, has destroyed them."

"And if his lordship should have explained the matter—if he should have acknowledged to the earl that they were missing, and if, as is not unlikely, he suspected me of being concerned in their loss, how would *you* account for the knowledge of their existence?"

"The difficulty you have suggested," replied the agent, triumphantly, "is at once removed by the fact that no person is more thoroughly convinced of their destruction than Lord Walsingham himself, for by his own hands does he believe they were consigned to the flames in accordance with the earl's wishes."

"Then it is easy to guess the packet you secreted in the desk was an exact counterpart of the one you had previously removed?"

"So like, even to the enclosures, that unless the handwriting of the earl had been long and closely studied, none could have discovered the deception. The visit that you saw made was not the first. And now, then, my good friend Bazzini," continued Jarvis, who for the time having had his attention distracted, had during the latter part of the conversation assumed the quietude of manner that was his dominant peculiarity, "you will of course understand that those letters it is of the highest importance I should preserve."

"And it is for that very reason that I also consider them of the highest importance that I must have them surrendered to myself," said the Italian, resolutely.

"*You* have them," returned the agent; "never!"

"Then the negotiation of this matter, as far as I am concerned, is at an end," said the Italian; and he rose as if to depart.

"Stay; you have not yet heard my reply," continued Jarvis, relenting, as he saw that the other was resolute in his demand; "if I yield to you these papers that I have so many urgent reasons to retain myself, may I then rely upon your co-operation with me?"

"To the utmost," was the response. "Do you agree to deliver them into my hands?"

"I do—I do," gasped the agent, despairingly; for he felt that he must relinquish one scheme to promote another; "you are compelling me to surrender the only chance I have of again swaying the earl over to my views; but even this I forego, rather than be denied the triumph of avenging myself on the man who has exposed the practices I have devoted so many years to conceal."

"Well then, it is now time to let me know the name of this busy meddler, and to me you may safely entrust his fate."

"He calls himself Sir John Barrington," answered Jarvis; "and though appearing under that name, I unfortunately believed him to be a man I formerly knew, called Mordannt. What has occurred this morning, however, has taught me I was mistaken, though the two persons are as much alike as though they had been twin brothers. This man has been recognised, by those who knew Sir John abroad, to be the same. He has returned with an amount of wealth that gives him an immense influence in the country, and has this day purchased Bradley Hall, in Cheshire, an estate belonging to the earl. It was there I first met him, when, by falsely representing himself to be, an old companion of mine, he wormed out of me certain acknowledgments connected with the period of our supposed intimacy, that, with other information he has obtained, in a manner which I cannot comprehend, has placed me altogether in his power."

"And you would rid yourself of him by means," added the Italian, in a low deep voice, "which can only effectually ensure his silence for the future."

"Yes," responded Jarvis; "and those means you pointed out to me with reference to another will alone suffice. He has already struck the first blow at my ruin; and the next would not only destroy my position in society, but even expose me, as he has threatened, to the risk of a criminal prosecution."

"And how many days have you reason to expect will elapse before he carries these threats into execution?" questioned Bazzini.

"Doubtless he will not cease from his efforts for a single instant," was the reply; "and not a moment must be lost in accomplishing our ends. There is no alternative but this. I am upon the verge of a frightful precipice, and your friendly hand can alone save me from being driven into the abyss."

"And you would have me, then, at once crush this dangerous foe you have created?"

"Listen," whispered Jarvis, drawing nearer the Italian, and he breathed in his ear a suggestion so horrible, that even Bazzini, inured as he was to the commission and contemplation of the most atrocious crimes, could not help shuddering at the intimation thus conveyed.

"Enough!" assented the Italian, "I will for you compound the fatal drug you require, but will there not be some difficulty in getting it administered?"

"None," cried Jarvis, "for to him you are unknown, and you may easily gain admission to his presence by soliciting his subscription to a charity, or on any other pretence that will serve the purpose. I have this day learned that his town residence is in Manchester Square, and that he retains only in his establishment a favourite servant, that he brought over from Madras. You will thus see that there is no occasion to apprehend any risk from the vigilance of his attendants."

"I have arranged my plan," responded Bazzini,

after a pause of consideration, "and you shall find it an effectual one."

"And you are certain of the efficacy of this preparation—that it will produce all those effects that you spoke about?"

"Certain!" ejaculated the Italian. "I know from the number of instances with which I am acquainted that it is as unfailing in its operation as it is of baffling detection. Of that death which art has contrived nature is alone accused."

"Then to-morrow call upon me at this direction," said the agent, giving the Italian his card, "and you shall receive what further instructions are necessary, with the conditions for which you have stipulated. I hoped through that important packet, which I preserved so long and so carefully till I could employ it to advantage, to have been able to enforce the earl's assent to whatever I might propose, but for that some other mode must be adopted. He shall find that I will not tamely submit to be driven from office and be compelled to sacrifice that fortune which my ingenuity had secured."

"The use to which I shall put them," affirmed Bazzini, "will in no respect interfere with any effort you may choose to make to reinstate yourself in your position. I have a certain object to attain, and it is only through such a channel that I can arrive at the point I seek; but this is a project entirely unconnected with your own."

"Well, I will refuse no longer—they shall be yours, my good friend Bazzini," cried Jarvis, extending his hand; "and now let us have one more glass to cement a friendship that, though thus renewed by chance, I trust will be of long duration between us, and then till to-morrow farewell."

The glasses were again filled, emptied, and with a recapitulation of the terms of the compact, the two diabolical miscreants separated, Jarvis to chuckle over the fate to which he had doomed his denouncer, and Bazzini to sustain the assumed character under which he intended that evening to deceive the opera-dancer.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ADVENTURE IN THE PARK.

One of the many phases of metropolitan life which never fail to carry with them a certain charm of interest and variety, is presented by the Regent's Park on a fine summer evening; a scene that, to the eye even of the most cursory observer, is replete with suggestive objects either for the passing reflection of the moment, or for those more profound thoughts that engage the attention of the philosopher.

That fine enclosure, with its broad and spacious avenues, its smoothly-gravelled walks, its soft green turf, its rows of stately trees, its pleasant vistas, and the zone of noble mansions by which it is engirdled, is a rare boon to the denizen of the smoky city; and of which, as the poorest shares its privileges with the wealthiest, the Londoner may well be proud.

The artisan and his family may here breathe the pure fresh air of the country, wafted from the heights of Hampstead, without a taint from the poisoned atmosphere that hangs like a thick mist of putrefying atoms around his own humble dwelling, doomed by the errors of a sluggish legislature to exist side by side with all the nuisances that a great city generates, and that the tenacious clutch of vested interest preserves. The children, gambolling with the careless laugh of infancy over the verdant sward, their gleeful play winning a smile of encouraging sympathy from their parents, or else extorting from the nursery maid who accompanies them a timorous word of remonstrance as she sees approaching the self-important guardian of the rights and privileges of the place; the throng of promenaders of all classes scattered over the broad area of the park, the flirtations of loving couples going on in quiet corners, the whirl of the carriages that roll round the outer circle in succession, the studious lounger poring by the last rays of the daylight over the pages of some favourite pocket volume, the coquettish servant girl smirking at the tall soldier by the railings, and the feeble movements of the invalid beyond, whose faltering limbs scarcely enable him to perform the exercise prescribed, make up, with a hundred other individual features, the varied aspect that the park presents on these occasions.

On this evening there were some among its frequenters with whom our narrative is connected.

In a dress too plain to attract notice, with her veil drawn in folds over her countenance, and anxiously avoiding the stream of pedestrians that were now issuing from the thoroughfares adjacent, towards the entrances of the enclosure, Celestine arrived at the place appointed.

Willingly would she have cherished the belief that the proposed interview was one that she need not fear to seek—that it was but the *ruse* of a romantic admirer, who sought by such a mode to disclose his passion. Her heart, fluttering with a variety of contending emotions, convinced her that there lurked a deeper interest in the adventure. Several times had she been on the point of turning back and leaving the affair still involved in mystery, or to be unravelled by succeeding incidents, but a powerful feeling of curiosity impelled her onwards, and she resolved to set her mind at rest by a firm and decisive course of action that would free her from the dread that she had previously felt, or make her fears become more terrible than ever.

The cloud that hung over the passages of her early life excited the most vivid apprehensions of the revelation that she expected to be made, and was the source of her most poignant sorrows. The idea had never been absent from her mind that this constant attendance of the Italian had been prompted by the knowledge he possessed of her real history; and now that the meaning of his continual annoyance was about to be made known, and his motives at last explained, her feelings were wrought to the acutest pitch of sensibility, and she shuddered lest her worst surmise should find a fearful confirmation in his words.

The clock struck the appointed hour, and precisely at the same instant a figure emerged from the crowd of promenaders, and assumed a solitary position in the centre of the avenue opposite Gloucester Gate.

Though his face was averted from the place where she stood, Celestine needed no further proof that he was the writer of the note that had brought her thither, and, nerving herself for the encounter, she crossed over to the spot, and, with as much courage as she could command, confronted those repulsive features which had so often before inspired her with an unconquerable aversion.

One timid look forced with a sudden effort, and she saw that it was indeed the Italian who stood before her.

Returning a glance of recognition, whilst a ray of triumph shot across his visage, he bowed respectfully,

and addressed to her a few words in that language to which she had been earliest accustomed, and which fell with a peculiar significance from his lips.

And what a torrent of remembrances now rushed through her mind as she heard that voice again, and was reminded by those sounds that he who was now speaking to her was the same that had led her, an orphan and an outcast, from the streets of Naples into the haunts of misery and crime! That the horrible thought which had occurred to her on the preceding evening had now received its dreaded confirmation, and that he with whom she was there conversing was the man who, by threats and coarse persuasion, had made her solicit alms from the wealthy and benevolent that they encountered by the roadside. But when he drew her aside to a more unfrequented spot, and continued the story of his following her step by step through her career, watching with exulting gratification the gradual advance she made in public favour, and nightly witnessing her most brilliant successes, she listened as one spell-bound by the power of a frightful fascination, and involuntarily yielded the obedience he had exacted of yore. He ascribed his reason for desiring an interview in such a manner and in such a place to the wish he felt that her mind might be prepared by degrees to receive the intelligence that he had now to impart, and it was not till then, he added, that he had established beyond a doubt the fact of her being really the same person that he said he had been so long desirous of discovering.

"And now," faltered Celestine, as he paused in the recital of those circumstances that possessed for her an interest of a thrillingly exciting nature, "since you have related sufficient to convince me that you are truly the person whom you represent yourself to be, what is this intelligence to which you have alluded, and against whom is the revenge you first spoke of to be directed?"

"Against her who has stolen you from those who had a better right to your services," returned Bazzini; "I swore it to your mother before she died."

"You!" ejaculated the girl, astounded by such a speech; "surely my heart cannot have deceived me—it is not possible that you"—and a shudder of repulsion that passed through her frame as she contemplated the frightful suspicion which had forcibly recurred to her, checked its utterance.

"Yes," asserted Bazzini, "I can comprehend your wish. You hoped to have found a handsomer and a better man than me to call your father; but although I see you have a reluctance to own me, the truth must be told nevertheless. I swore to your mother that I would not rest until I learned tidings of you. Your mother was my wife, and though it has cost me time and trouble enough to seek you, I have kept my oath, albeit she is no longer alive to see how famously it has been redeemed."

"I must have the most satisfactory proofs of the truth of what you allege," cried Celestine, her firmness sinking under the painful ordeal to which she was subjected, and her voice failing with it; "until those proofs are brought before me, and legally supported, I can acknowledge no such claim as this."

"The proofs, of course, I have brought over with me," said the Italian, "and I have a witness besides who can swear to all that I have stated. Your real name is Beatrice Bazzini. You were born near Naples; we were then very poor, and unable to provide for you, we got you received in the charitable asylum, where you remained until your eighth year. I drew you away by stealth, as you will remember, and we were then looking to you to assist our broken fortunes. I need not remind you what occurred whilst I was away from the tavern where we stopped. I had left you for a few minutes whilst I went to increase my funds by selling a silver tankard I had borrowed from the landlord, and you were carried off by a fine madam, who it appears has made you despise the humble parentage from which you sprung."

"And against this worthy lady, who has been my benefactress, you would now dare to display your animosity?"

"Not if we are to be on good terms with each other, and you choose to plead for her," rejoined the Italian, "but she has raised you above your proper station, she has taught you to forget what you originally were, and though fortune has smiled on myself since then, I do not mean to forego the authority that I have a right to exercise."

"And your own means of subsistence—what are they?" interrupted Celestine, shrinking from the belief that was gaining possession of her mind, despite the personal aversion she entertained; "if money is the only object you have in claiming this relationship, perhaps it may be in my power to assist—to relieve you."

"Perhaps you are not far wrong there," bluntly replied Bazzini; "but no small sum will suffice for me. You are young, and have charms enough to fascinate any nobleman you choose. Let me hear of your having his purse in your keeping, and I shall then be able to secure the amount that it would now be only useless to name."

This admission of the mercenary principles by which he was actuated, and the brutal coarseness of the suggestion by which it was accompanied, so shocked the ears of Celestine, that for a minute she was incapable of reply; and the man, either misunderstanding her silence or wilfully misinterpreting it to suit his purpose, continued:—

"You see, mademoiselle, that I have to expect from you not only a fair share of your present earnings, which, as I have been told, are considerable, but I have also to claim the arrears of the time that has elapsed since we last met, and which ought to have been mine, as the one most entitled to profit by your exertions. However, as you seem inclined to take my case into consideration, I shall not be too pressing upon you, and will therefore depend on your generosity, and the affectionate regard which a daughter feels for her parent, to regulate the amount that you may think proper to give."

"Leave me, sir," interrupted Celestine, no longer able to suppress the indignation she felt at his impudent demand; "I will not suffer this conversation to continue another instant, nor will I degrade myself by listening to a further declaration of your infamous designs. I did not from the first believe in the assertions you made, and am now still more convinced by the nature of your last proposal that this is merely a scheme for extorting money. I hoped to meet one that would be able to give me the information he promised, and was willing to have liberally rewarded my informant; but I did not expect to be insulted by a false statement, so grossly improbable that it defeats even its very object."

"As you please," answered the Italian, with cool effrontery; "it was my wish to spare you from an exposure that might lead perhaps to disagreeable explanations; but since you prefer a public to a private settlement of the question, I shall now consider my-

self at liberty to arrange the matter in my own way. You have defied me to produce proofs of our relationship, alleged that I have fabricated a story that I cannot substantiate, and it must now be seen on which side lies the error. When next we meet I shall be prepared to exact the terms that I now only came to request."

And with this he moved a few paces from the agitated hearer of his menacing determination.

"Stay," cried Celestine, as she saw he was about to leave, and felt she had real cause for apprehension should his assertions prove correct; "you have, at least, a right to give me time for consideration. I need not wonder at the absence of all feelings of attachment, for with you my thoughts are only linked by remembrances of cruelty and oppression; but if I could purchase your silence respecting those days that I would willingly forget, and obtain by that means freedom from further annoyances, whether you have the just claim upon my bounty that you represent, or not, I would gladly place my purse at your disposal."

"Ha! now you begin to talk reason," said the Italian, who had retraced his steps; "I will give you one week to reflect upon the arrangements that must be entered into between us. If you then agree to the proposal I have made, 'tis well; if not, you will have only your own obstinacy to condemn, if I publicly proclaim the close affinity that exists between Pietro Bazzini, the adventurer, and the renowned favourite of the opera, whose praise is heard in every city in Europe, and whose lowly origin," he continued, ironically, "is known to so few."

"And these proofs that you have mentioned—this witness that you have offered to bring before me as a corroboration of your story?" reminded Celestine, anxiously. "I must be assured of their correctness."

"You will find the evidence I shall bring forward," returned Bazzini, "will leave you no room for doubt. You are my child—my only one; and though Nature has been so liberal in her gifts to you, and so churlish to me, it does not follow that we should be less friendly on that account. Well, I know that you are ashamed of me," he added, as the hand that he had proffered was gently repulsed; "but I don't ask affection from you—it is not for me, I feel, to be too warm in the manifestation of my paternal feelings, since you are right in saying that I showed little love for you when we were together. My only desire now is to let you see that I do not forget the same blood flows in our veins, and that I intend to look to you for the help to which I am entitled."

"In one week from this date I shall be prepared with my answer," returned Celestine, in as firm a voice as she could assume, to disguise the painful emotions that were excited by the communication this interview had elicited; "you know where I can be found."

"I have passed the door of your residence frequently," said Bazzini, "but until I had first seen you on this subject elsewhere, I did not venture to intrude myself. By that time you may expect me;" and with a gesture that indicated the preservation of her secret for that interval, he abruptly retired through the avenue leading to the gate, and was in another moment lost sight of among the crowd of persons that were returning from the park.

As soon as she found herself alone, the conviction of the dangerous position in which she was placed overwhelmed her with a flood of agonising reflections. To her highly-wrought temperament, the revelation of her early life, that had been made by the man from whom she had just parted, seemed a disclosure that, though long dreaded, was now felt to be crushing and appalling in its reality. Sensitive in the highest degree, and acutely susceptible of the opinion of those around her, she knew that the discovery by the world of these circumstances would force her to seek seclusion. The realisation of the frightful dreams that had tortured her, merely to imagine, was a check to her career that she never hoped to recover. Her brain reeled with the contemplation of those maddening thoughts that obtruded themselves upon her, and she saw no chance of escape from the danger that threatened her, but that offered by the sudden extinction of all the brilliant triumphs that it had once been her pride and her ambition to sustain.

Thus pondering over the strange event that, after the lapse of so many years, had again cast so dark a shadow on her path, and resolving to evade the future persecution of the Italian by withdrawing from her profession, Celestine was about to return homeward, when two men, shabbily attired, crossed before her, and, in speaking to each other as they passed, mentioned the name of Walsingham.

Startled by the utterance of a name so familiar, and too distinctly falling on her ear to allow the possibility of her being mistaken, she quickened her pace so as to catch the subject of their conversation; and as the hour had now arrived for closing the various entrances to the Park, she was enabled to follow closely behind them without attracting the observation of others.

The dusk of the evening and the thick veil that obscured her countenance relieved her from all apprehension of being recognised, and as they turned from the gate, and kept along by the outer railings on the darkest side of the road, she followed on their track without hesitation.

It was evident, from the earnest manner in which their colloquy was carried on, that the subject was one of deep interest to both; and as a word every now and then escaped them in a louder tone than the rest, Celestine pressed onward as near to them as she could, with the hope of gathering from these slight hints some reference to the import of their discourse.

One was a tall powerful looking man, dressed in a garb that denoted a taste for vulgar finery. A long drab coat reaching below his knees was ornamented with broad shining buttons, and his hat was thrust upon his head in that slanting slangish fashion that not unfrequently furnishes a clue to the habits and predilections of the wearer. Round his throat was twisted a thick red neckerchief, and from the glimpse of his countenance that she had caught as he passed her, Celestine was not impressed with a very favourable opinion of his character.

The man who was his companion had still less pretensions to respectability. A short coat worn to a glossy surface presented, with the rest of his apparel, numerous indications of having seen considerable service. He was of slighter make than the other, but his profile, as he turned to address his associate, was equally marked and unpleasing. It was the association of a nobleman with the speech of two such ruffians as these appeared to be that first drew her attention towards them, and excited her curiosity to learn in what manner any mention of his name could have been made.

She had followed them for some distance without being able to overhear more than a few disjointed sentences, which, from the unintelligible phrases they employed, failed to convey any meaning to her mind,

and she was on the point of giving up her task as fruitless, when the two suddenly stopped short at the top of Portland Place, and afraid of her object having been suspected, she passed under the projecting portico of a mansion close by, and receding unobserved behind one of the pillars, she there awaited their separation and departure.

She had hardly taken this precaution to elude their observation, before one of the men turned round to notice whether there was any person near them, and then said to his companion:

"Vell, I tell yer, Tony isn't playing fair with us, and I mean, for one, to get quit of him altogether. That boy Jacky, as I calls him—him that he sends out as his spy—told me this wery arternoon that there was a plant going on agen that same crib belonging to Lord Walsingham that we talked about afore, and that we are to know nuffin about it, becos he has got a new pal of his own that he wants to shove into the same line of business."

"Ah! I never did care about trusting them furriners," responded the other, "and it would have been better for all of us if that precious artful chap, that Tony Borelli, had never been let into so many dodges. The old 'un, who was in the same line afore, was all right enough, and he could be depended upon; but the cove that has got into his quarters is one for us and two for himself."

"And vhot do you say, then, to managing this affair on the sly, and giving him the slip?" said the first speaker, who, under the name of Gubbins, is already familiar to the reader as one of the coiner's gang; "since it's all up vith the smashing game, yer might as vell do vhot ve've been talkin' about as ve come along."

"Well, I don't mind," replied Slogger, for it was no other than that individual, "but I'm mixed up in a queer sort of caper already. You recollect that fellow we used to call the Phantom?"

"And vhot of him?" asked Gubbins, impatiently.

"Why he is paying me to—but stop, I forgot; that's a secret I mustn't let any body know just yet; though, some day or other, I could tell you a rare story about him."

"Vell, I haven't time to hear it now, if you could," rejoined his associate, abruptly, "for I ought to be up at the crib in Agar Town by this time; but meeting you down the road here, I thought ve might have a chat abont this matter, if so be you likes to do it vith me."

"And when do you mean to begin the business?"

"Vhy that I haven't fixed upon, for I must try and pump some more ont of that crafty imp that Tony has got, and know vhen the others mean to set out; but I shall see you up at the new roosting-place to-morrow night I suppose, and then ve can settle."

"I'll be there," was the reply; and after a few more words had been exchanged, nttered in too low a tone to be distinctly heard by the breathless listener, a parting salntation was given, and Gubbins hastened away down the New Road in one direction, whilst Slogger pursned his way in another.

Emerging from her involuntary concealment, Celestine darted acroes the street, and too much absorbed in her reflections on the dialogue she had overheard to feel any fatigue from the distance, she walked back to her residence; and it was with no little pleasure that she arrived once again at home. The reaction from the excitement of her interview with the Italian, and the incident that had followed, proved almost more than she could snpport. All that she had learned from the conversation of the two ruffians, interlarded as it had been with the jargon of their craft, sufficed but to impress her with a vague idea that the property of Lord Walsingham was endangered by an attempt at burglary that wonld soon be made; and it was in the belief that she could prevent its consummation that she now rejoiced over the precantionary measure she had taken. But there was another evil impending that it remained for her to avert.

To endure the presence of that man who had arrogated the position of one having so strong a claim npon her as her father, was beyond her power. The instinctive hatred with which she viewed him would be doubly painful if those proofs that he had spoken of were indeed forthcoming, and she recoiled from the prospect of such a meeting in horror. Even considering him only as the mendicant who conld reveal the fact of her having been fostered by the hand of charity, and brought by him to the level of a street outcast, she shuddered at the risk of a second encounter. Her pride was wounded by the idea of acknowledging such a being for a parent, and she determined to fly from the consequences of a discovery that in either way would expose her, as she fancied, to the scorn and ridicule of her friends and companions.

That night, before she retired to rest, Celestine wrote a letter to Lord Walsingham, in which, without daring to explain the motives by which she was influenced, she formally accepted the proposal he had made, and consented to become the inmate of his villa. It was her wish, she said, after making her last appearance at the opera on the following evening, to immediately seclude herself from the public gaze, and she would therefore avail herself of the means of retirement he had so generously offered. To the contemplated robbery, of which she had accidentally acquired the knowledge, no further allusion was made than that conveyed in an intimation that there was another subject of a less agreeable nature upon which she wished to confer with him when they met. "To-morrow," wrote Celestine, in concluding her epistle, "to-morrow I belong to the world; the next day, my dear Walsingham, I belong only to yourself."

The following morning she acquainted Madame Romani, who was, as usual, her first visitor, with all that had transpired, and from her she received such solace and sympathy as her peculiar position demanded. In a kindly tone of encouragement, however, the vocalist urged her to accept the offer of Lord Walsingham as the only hope of eluding the future persecution which might follow; and great was her joy when she learned that her wishes had been anticipated. That evening there was again a triumphant call for her at the termination of her performance, and, being the close of the season, tempting offers were made by the manager for a renewal of the engagement, but these she firmly declined, and the next day witnessed the arrival of the opera-dancer at the magnificent villa that had been prepared for her reception.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SEMPSTRESS.

In the upper room of a small house, situated in one of those quiet streets in the Borough that link the broad and busy thoroughfare of Newington Causeway with the dreary vicinity of the Borough Road, there might have been seen—on the same evening when these events that have been just recorded took place—

a young girl, industriously engaged in needlework, and striving, by assiduous attention to her employment, to accomplish a certain allotted task before nightfall.

In order to husband the last minutes of the fading daylight, she had drawn her seat nearer the window, and as with a swift hand she plied the glistening needle through the fabric, the light of the western sky left upon her profile a becoming glow, and gave a roseate tint to the cheek, which many late vigils and anxious cares had lately robbed of its wonted flush of health. The room was humbly but neatly furnished. A couch, drawn on one side into a recess, and screened from view by a full chintz curtain, occupied one side of the little chamber; and on the other, by the fireplace, was a small round table, now covered with the dress-making materials on which she was occupied.

That industrious sempstress was the bird-fancier's daughter. It was here that Mary Randall had dwelt since the night when she had quitted the home of the bird-fancier, and owing principally to the assistance that she had derived from the kind-hearted widow in whose house she lodged, and who had been the means of getting her employment, her change of residence was not yet productive of any serious pecuniary inconvenience that might have caused her to regret the step she had taken.

Scanty as was the pittance she thus obtained, too small to allow the acquirement of more than the most ordinary necessaries of life, she had yet a proud and gratifying sense of independence in her position. It was this feeling that enabled her to undergo every privation without a murmur, and though the money thus earned, and laboriously earned as it was, barely sufficed to last her through the week, she had hitherto drawn but slightly on the little fund with which she had come provided.

But now the prospect before her threatened to shake her faith in the future; and the belief that she could continue to gain a livelihood by the exercise of her industry, was no longer the confident hope that had hitherto sustained her cheerful self-reliance.

For when the dress on which she was engaged had been entrusted to her, it was accompanied by an intimation that it would be the last that could be given out for some time, as there was not now work sufficient to employ the extra hands, and consequently when this was finished her only source of remunerative occupation was gone.

It was a portion of a robe of white satin that Mary had to make up as a wedding dress, and as the necessity for its speedy completion had caused the order to be divided among various day-workers, the execution of a part had fallen to her share.

The advantage of a little early tuition in the art, together with the instructions she had received, and quickly profited by, from her friendly landlady, who had been herself an apprentice to the business, and had given Mary a strong recommendation to her former mistress, enabled the bird-fancier's daughter to compete with the most experienced of her sister workwomen, and the approving satisfaction with which her previous attempts had been received, led to her selection as one likely to bestow more than ordinary skill and care upon her work.

Thus assiduously labouring to complete her portion by the hour that had been expressly stipulated for it to be brought home, she had even denied herself all refreshment, that no time might be lost in the fulfilment of her contract; and just as the last rays of daylight faded away, she finished her task, and prepared to take a hasty meal before setting forth with the proof of her diligence.

It was then that, anxious to know whether she could afford the extravagance, and seeking for the means to defray her omnibus fare, Mary dipped her fingers into the little bead purse that formed her treasury, and seeing how small a sum remained, she sighed to think that she had no immediate source from which it could be replenished.

By adding to the remuneration she expected to receive the slender finances she already possessed, Mary calculated that with strict economy and a rigid denial of all that might appear to verge upon luxury, there was just sufficient to eke out one month's subsistence. If within that time she should be unable to find employment, what would then become of her?

This question that thus forced itself upon her attention gave rise to a train of reflections which was far from enlivening her spirits, and she felt—perhaps the first time she had seriously considered the matter—that for a young girl to be thrown alone upon the wide world was indeed to hazard a myriad dangers in her struggle for existence.

And how frightfully limited is that sphere in which woman can honourably obtain even the scantiest subsistence! Woman, who, throughout the life which she is the means of giving to others, has to undergo the severest trials, is the one whose services are depreciated the most and remunerated the least. She, whose smile brightens the home of man, is sentenced, when her own home demands her exertions, to encounter a throng of perils and privations which man would shrink from or sink under; and many a pallid cheek and sunken eye will bear evidence of the ill-requited crushing toil that daily bends thousands nearer towards the grave to which they are prematurely doomed. The servant, the needlewoman, and the governess—and in these avocations are mentioned the three great channels of employment, each overstocked and overcrowded, which are open to the industrious female—and yet we find her overworked and underpaid in all. The swarms of outcasts driven to the streets, themselves proclaim the appalling truth, and attest the errors of a system which casts a stain upon the society in which it is tolerated, and is a disgrace to the age in which we live.

Without venturing to further dwell upon the question of the wrongs of woman, that has had a volume for its discussion, we may turn aside from this digression, into which we have been unwittingly betrayed, and explain that the sempstress was not then looking at the subject in any other point of view than that which immediately affected herself. Mary had resolved never to apply to her father for assistance, and as she found the little money she had brought with her fast ebbing away, notwithstanding the economy with which her expenditure was regulated, it was natural that she should begin to ponder on the consequences.

A hasty repast, made amid the shadows of twilight, renewed her strength to undertake the walk before her; and her simple toilet being easily performed, Mary was soon ready for departure. The costly garment of satin that was to form the bridal robe was neatly folded into a parcel, and with this in her hand, she left the little chamber; and finding that the hour was later than she had anticipated, she determined to proceed to the Elephant and Castle, and thence accelerate her progress by taking an omnibus to the West-end.

It was a lovely moonlight night, and Mary felt those bland and soothing influences which the exhaustless effulgence of the silver luminary rarely fails to pour upon the soul, giving a fresh direction to her thoughts. The night that had led to her adventure with Alfred Howard, the handsome youth that she had rescued from the hovel in the marshes, was vividly called to mind; not that she needed any stimulus in that respect, for the silver cross he had given to her had been secretly worn round her neck ever since, as a token of his regard not being yet effaced from her remembrance. But it was now suggested to her by many circumstances which made her fall into a reverie concerning it, even amid the bustling crowds by which she was environed.

To those in love—and Mary must come under this category—there seems to be an occult property in a moonbeam peculiarly its own, abstracting us from the boundary of worldly thoughts, and plunging us involuntarily into a region of contemplation.

A profound yet pleasing melancholy steals upon the soul. The mind travels back into the past, and there finds a world only peopled with the forms of those who—alas, that we should say it—are dead or distant. Shadowy remembrances of old friends who have shared with us the scene we are now enjoying rush back upon the memory, and every note in the strain sung by Fancy to our hearts comes as an echo of the past, a voiced vibration of a melody heard "long, long ago."

It was in such a spirit of retrospection that Mary remembered an interesting narrative recorded in one of the volumes which she had met with in the course of her wayward reading, and she wished that the same compact had been entered into between herself and him from whom she had parted. It related how two lovers, unavoidably separated from each other by distance, softened the pangs of absence, and preserved the intensity of their passion unimpaired for years, by having recourse to a fanciful expedient. They agreed, before their departure, to select one "bright particular star" in the firmament, as the object of their mutual attention, at a certain hour every night so that when one was gazing on its glowing refulgence, the other might feel the same rays were being transmitted to the eyes of both, thus fixing, as it

were, their blended vision in a starry point. She pictured to herself the possibility of her lover being now at sea, an isolated voyager, traversing the ocean with the feelings of an emigrant who has left behind him all that he held most dear in the land from which he has, perhaps, parted for ever—and then she wondered if he was gazing in unison with her on the same satellite, the sole object reminding him of his native country as it lighted up the perilous path of the wayfarer.

In this way, thought Mary, might a moonbeam be regarded as a welcome messenger from friends far distant—the aerial missive of a fond affection, eloquent with the retrospection of the past, and forming that link in the communion of hearts which is so great a solace in the days of separation, and so pleasant a theme to dwell upon when we again meet.

But in this work-a-day world the castles built in the air, more especially if the streets happen to be the scene of our architectural imaginings, are liable to be shattered by the most common-place of incidents, and so in this instance it proved with the romantic reverie in which the sempstress had begun to indulge.

Absorbed in these reflections, Mary had arrived, almost unconsciously, at the end of the Causeway, when her foot tripped against the projection of the kerbstone, and her parcel would have fallen to the ground had it not been for the timely intervention of a friendly arm that was thrust forth to save it by a gentlemanly-dressed young man who happened to be passing at the moment.

Of course the sempstress could not do less than thank the stranger who had rendered her this trifling service; and, after a courteous acknowledgment, he left her to proceed in the direction whither she was going.

It was an ordinary occurrence—the event of an instant; but from the earnest glance at her features that she was aware the person had bestowed, the incident left behind a more than ordinary impression.

She fancied that with that look was evinced a desire to take advantage of the meeting to which this accident had given rise, to cultivate a further acquaintance; and it was with some vexation in consequence that she now reflected on the awkwardness that had exposed her to receive this assistance.

Crossing the road towards the tavern, which, with its throng of vehicles on every side, presents so animated a picture at this period of the evening, she had turned round once or twice in a flutter of nervous trepidation to see whether she had been followed by the stranger, but as none resembled him among the crowd of persons who were moving to and fro in the various thoroughfares around her, her confidence was restored, and banishing the memory of the casual encounter from her mind, Mary entered the omnibus that was to take her to the residence of the milliner, and the circumstance was almost forgotten before her journey was at an end.

But a new incident speedily brought the first back to her remembrance. She had alighted from the vehicle at the Regent's Circus, and was proceeding towards the establishment of Madame Duchard, in Regent Street, when, having descended from the outside at the same time that the sempstress came from the interior, the person who had accosted her in the Borough took a similar direction, and, as if with the intention of ascertaining whither she went, kept at a moderate distance behind.

Perceiving that she was followed, and by the same individual—for a thoughtless glance back at the road she had crossed had apprised her of this embarrassing companionship—Mary Randall quickened her pace to escape from his observation, and was glad to find herself at the door of her employer's house without having experienced any further annoyance on her way.

The residence of Madame Duchard, who personally supervised the various departments of millinery and dress-making, was an establishment of a very extensive and imposing character. The scale of magnitude on which that lady conducted her business, and by which she regulated her charges, was exemplified in the display of showy gilt frames and plate glass that adorned her spacious windows, and revealed beyond a tempting vista of those costly habiliments so irresistibly fascinating to the female eye. The shop was now closed, but there was a side-entrance at a private door, having a large brass plate upon it, conspicuously engraved with the name of the proprietress; and to this portion of the premises Mary obtained a ready admission. Passing through a long lobby, leading to a range of work-rooms at the back, the servant ushered her into a little parlour, and telling her, with a revengeful look of insolence for the trouble she had caused, to wait there until her mistress was disengaged, the abigail bounced out of the room, and, closing the door, left Mary to indulge in such reflections as the solitary imprisonment that she had to undergo might be supposed to engender.

That her meditations were not of a very lively turn might be concluded from the aspect of the room to which she had been introduced. There was a small square table, without a cover, and four chairs, very angular in shape, and very formally arranged, with a candle-lamp left burning on the naked sideboard in the last stage of lambent dissolution. The walls were quite bare of ornament, and the paper upon them was of a stiff, pointed pattern, that made the eyes ache to dwell upon it. The only relief to the monotony of a visitor, who had to endure a trial of patience in this apartment, was provided by a book of the fashions, left for perusal on the table; but the sharp, unruffled edges of the leaves, all uncut, the glossy newness of the cover, and the unviolated complexity of the folding plates, were sufficient of themselves to deter any but the most courageous among the curious from criticising the contents.

Compelled, therefore, to fall back upon her own resources, Mary was thinking, during her temporary incarceration in this genteel dungeon, of a variety of subjects, each of which brought with it another in its train. She thought of her old abode in Ratcliff Highway, wondered whether her father regretted or rejoiced at her absence, and if he were still pursuing the same reckless course of life. And then she thought of the many weary hours she had spent in that place of wretchedness, reading the old volume of voyages, and with what interest she had followed through every page the perils of the daring navigators of yore. And thus, by a natural transition, her fancy brought to mind the handsome form of Alfred Howard, and how it was possible that he, like those of whom she had read, might be battling at that moment with the dangers that beset a seaman's life. With this her hand almost involuntarily sought the token that she wore, and as she gazed on that pledge of his remembrance, Mary felt how greatly it would add to her satisfaction if she could learn whether with that gage of affection she retained the heart of the giver. The warmth of her own feelings towards him, the deep earnestness of the passion with which he had inspired her, were

hardly known even to herself. The heart of the sempstress, unschooled in its own emotions, failed to make her comprehend the extent to which her happiness had become involved; and the strong ascendancy of that first love, created at first sight, was only felt and acknowledged when there was a chord struck that caused those secret sympathies to respond with a tremulous vibration.

Such a response had been elicited by the casual encounter to which we have adverted. She felt that her affections were already concentrated in one, who, though she was never destined perhaps to behold him again, would always occupy the foremost place in her regard. From the slightest approach to an avowal of attachment from any other, she shrank as a treasonable encroachment on the sovereign sway to which she had rendered up the first allegiance of her heart.

Thus constant to the image that had been the earliest object of her adoration, it was with a timid and distrustful feeling of aversion that she received advances that might indicate the expectation of it being supplanted by another.

These mingled reflections were at last broken in upon by the solemn entrance of a tall figure, very stiff and stately, and which, in cold and contemptuous tones, condescended to announce itself as being Miss Crump, the forewoman of Madame Duchard's establishment.

This important personage had the same disagreeable angularity about her that characterised the apartment into which she had entered. As she marched slowly from the doorway into the centre of the parlour, her arms took the form of triangles against her long slender body, and the elbow on each side ended in a sharp, bony point. Her chin and nose were both decidedly angular, and her eyebrows had a strong tendency that way, whilst the little hair she had formed sharp corners to her face under a starched pointed cap with a peak of pink ribbon at the top of it. Her scissors, suspended by a piece of black tape, dangled at open angles below her waist, and in one eye, at least, with which she looked very pointedly at every thing and every body, there was a most unquestionable and objectionable obliqnity.

Such was the individual to whose strict management the minor arrangements of Madame Duchard's establishment were confided, and who now, before uttering a word, subjected the personal appearance of Mary to a rigid scrutiny.

This critical examination—which, owing to the visual failing mentioned, had all the appearance of being scornfully directed to the flickering lamp on the sideboard—was no sooner completed, than Miss Crump made a small model of a gothic arch with her mouth, and drawled out:—

"Oh, you are the young person, I believe, that had the skirts of the wedding-dress to make?"

Mary admitted that she was justified in her suspicion, which was the less extraordinary as a proof of Miss Crump's penetrating sagacity, since Mary had received the material from the forewoman herself, and who had thus not acted from remarkable liberality, but solely in obedience to the orders of her superior. As it was, she only quietly unpinned the parcel for her inspection, and with respectful submission awaited the opinion that the angular lady was pursing up her lips to pronounce upon it.

It was astonishing how many faults Miss Crump contrived to discover in so small a compass, and with what ingenuity of criticism she managed to find fault with the same thing in twenty different ways. Not a thread or stitch escaped her microscopic investigation, and every portion of the dress underwent the ordeal of being looked at and commented upon in every possible point of view. The result of this slashing critique, which, had the subject been an article of literature instead of an article of apparel, would have done credit to the most astute quarterly reviewer, was the discovery, at last, that every thing was entirely wrong, and that it was impossible to suppose that any body could find out any thing about it that was perfectly right. She, in fact, never imagined that it could be otherwise, when out-workers were called in to the establishment, and she had always told Madame Duchard so, as that lady would acknowledge, if called upon, and who would now confess that this was a triumphant proof that what she had predicted was correct, if any person, indeed, had dared to think the reverse. She would, however, take it to Madame Duchard herself, and see what *she* had to say about it, though she (Miss Crump) was quite sure it would never do, and that, indeed, it was quite spoiled; but she did not wish to appear too severe in her judgment, and that therefore she would heroically undertake to exhibit it to her, though the dreadful explosion of rage and vexation that would immediately follow, no one could be presumed to risk but herself, and even she wondered how her nerves would be able to stand such a shock. This, and a great deal more of a similar kind, needless to be here set down, was duly stated by Miss Crump. She spoke in a measured authoritative tone of voice, that delivered each sentence by instalments of a word at a time, and with as much deliberation as if every syllable had to be sharpened upon her teeth before it could be uttered with a sufficiently pointed effect. The harangue, however, terminated at last, with a disdainful toss of the spoiled garment over her arm, and giving what seemed to be a severe caution to the fashion-book, not to move under any circumstances, but which was meant to be a stern command for the other to wait there till she returned, the chivalrous forewoman went up to the show-rooms to become a martyr to her generosity and love of justice.

Directly she was gone, Mary, quite unprepared for such a reception as she had had, and feeling that so severe an attack was utterly undeserved, burst into tears. It was the only source from which her wounded spirit, chafed and troubled as it was, could derive relief. Crushed and dispirited by the trial she had undergone, she hardly felt courage enough to again face her tormentor, and fearful only of her motives being misconstrued, she would at once have quitted the house and resigned all hope of remuneration for what she had performed. But in the very height of her sorrow, and when, so intense was her anguish, she felt that she could have wept on for hours in sheer vexation, a cheerful youthful face was thrust in hurriedly at the door, and in an instant, under the influence of that sunny countenance, her tears dried up, her sadness vanished, and her self-possession returned.

"I beg your pardon," said the young girl, who now revealed herself, and who, with that unaffected politeness that wins upon the heart at once, proceeded to apologise for her intrusion, "I thought our forewoman, Miss Crump, was here."

"She has just left, and I believe to see Madame Duchard," said Mary—a pensive shade again overspreading her countenance as she thought of the purpose for which she had gone.

"Thank you, I am obliged to you," said the fair intruder; adding, as she noticed the light half extin-

guished, "but your lamp is nearly out—I will exchange it, if you will allow me, for one that has been left burning in the hall;" and with this intention the obliging girl crossed over towards the table to which the lamp had been transferred, and in so doing her quick bright eye detected in Mary's moistened cheek the trace of newly-fallen tears.

Having effected the exchange, instead of quitting the room immediately, she looked tenderly and compassionately upon the features of Mary, and said, in a musical, conciliatory voice:

"Do not think me impertinently intrusive if I ask you *why* you have been weeping thus, and if I can alleviate in any way the sorrow you seem to have felt. You are a stranger here, I know; and from what I have seen and heard, I believe you have been one of the extra hands engaged by Madame Duchard. Miss Crump has been harsh with you, and unjustly, and you feel hurt at the treatment you have experienced from her. Is it not so?"

Yielding to the persuasive influence of this address, and the encouraging manner in which it was spoken, Mary acknowledged that she was correct in supposing such had been the case, and thanked her for this expression of her sympathy.

"I thought it was," resumed her companion, "for I have seen her treat several in the same manner when they first came."

"You are yourself, then, engaged here?" asked Mary, inquiringly.

"I was an apprentice to Madame Duchard," was the reply, "and have only been a few weeks out of my time. The present forewoman has not been here long, and is, I think, not very likely to remain—but this is in mutual confidence of course," she added, with a smile—"for none of the young ladies like her. She is very disagreeable sometimes. But tell me in what way *you* have excited Miss Crump's animosity?"

Mary briefly related the circumstance that led to the severity of the female critic.

"Well, that is singular enough," cried the first speaker, "for it seems that we have both, without knowing it, been employed on different parts of the same dress. I was sure that we were intended to be friends when I first saw you, and this is another reason for the existence of an intimacy between us. But come, I will at once relieve you from all anxiety about your work. You shall come up stairs with me to Madame Duchard herself, for you must know that I am quite a favourite of hers, and, they do say, have some little influence with her; but of that," she continued, with a merry laugh, "you shall have yourself the opportunity of judging, for I intend my first trial of it to be exerted in your favour."

"Oh, thank you!" returned Mary, warmly; "you know not how much I am indebted to you, for on this depends——" and then, afraid of disclosing too much, she suddenly checked herself, and with a slight show of confusion as she rose from her seat, she said, "but may I not ask the name of her who is so kindly disposed to exercise her privilege on my behalf?"

"They call me Emma Thornton," answered the kind-hearted girl, clasping the hand that was extended towards her in gratitude with a reassuring pressure, "and yours I know is Mary Randall, for by that name I heard you spoken of on the day you were first introduced here; but come," she continued, "we must be prompt in our appeal to the higher tribunal, or the Spider, as we call her, will have spun all her web before we get there."

"But shall you not injure your own position by thus appearing to support mine?" remonstrated Mary; "I would not for the world have another suffer for me, particularly with an intention so generous and disinterested."

"Not I," interrupted Emma; "I am more anxious for you to accompany me, since it happens that the Lady Adeline Temple, for whom the bridal dress is intended, has this very evening called to give some additional orders; and as she is now here, an excellent opportunity presents itself for trying on. Madame Duchard will be pleased with the suggestion—you and I can assist—and we can then share her ladyship's approval fairly between us; or should there be any great fault found in it," she added, with an air of mock solemnity, "we shall be best able to make the alterations pointed out."

Thus speaking, and without heeding any further remonstrances, Mary led her up the broad flight of stairs to the show-rooms, pointing out on her way the long-room set apart for the workpeople, many of whom, as there were some heavy orders to execute, were at work later than usual. At the summit of the first landing a pair of folding glass doors communicated with a suite of stylishly-furnished apartments beyond; and entering these, Emma paused before the door of a boudoir, accessible only to the proprietress and her most fashionable patrons, and requesting Mary to wait for her there a few minutes, Emma tapped gently at the outer portal, and the next instant was admitted.

It was evident from what took place that the fault-finding propensities of Miss Crump had met with a firm and effectual check, either from the timely entrance of Emma, or from the nature of her criticisms not having been appreciated by the audience for whose especial advantage they had been made. Emma, in fact, had not been more than a few minutes in the apartment before Miss Crump stalked indignantly out with a spiderlike stealthiness that made her soubriquet not inappropriate. Every angle of her body, from the point of her cap to the points of her scissors, was looking more sharp and fierce than ever. Without noticing the sempstress, or appearing even to be aware of her vicinity, the forewoman marched in sullen grandeur down the stairs, and before the last step had received her dignified footfall, Mary was called in to the chamber, and the elaborate process of adapting a garment to the majestic proportions of the female form was then commenced.

Far be it from us to seek to pry into the mysteries of a lady's boudoir, and particularly at such a critical moment when the future bride is arraying herself in the habiliments of the wedding day. The very mirror, before which the fine figure of Lady Adeline was displayed, modestly refused to retain the bewitching impression, lest it should meet the eye of the inquisitive footman, that the next morning polished its glossy surface. The white corset closely pressing against the voluptuous form of the beautiful betrothed, the rounded shoulders swelling in graceful curves above its boundary, the soft, yielding bosom heaving in undulating movements beneath its folds, must all therefore be pictured only by the imagination that can dare to attempt to realise the scene. It will suffice for our purposes to state that the robe gave unequivocal satisfaction to the wearer, fitted to miraculous precision, and that so delighted was Lady Temple with the skilful assistance and unassuming demeanour displayed by the bird-fancier's daughter, that she offered, before she went from the room, to

receive her as an attendant in her own establishment, an offer which Mary gladly and gratefully accepted.

"And how shall I ever be able to recompense you for this kindness?" cried Mary to her companion, as they descended the stairs, elated with the result of their mission; "to you, my dear Miss Thornton, I am much indebted, and I can never grow tired of expressing my obligations."

"If you wish really to repay me for this trifling service, and deserve never to be scolded by me, you will succeed in both respects by putting a seal upon your lips, for the future, concerning it."

"The severest punishment you could inflict upon me for trespassing so far on your good nature," added Mary, in playful remonstrance;" you have lightened my heart of a burden that was oppressing me most heavily, but now, through your introduction to Lady Temple, I am picturing nothing but golden visions for the future."

"I know the inconveniences to which we are all subjected at times," said Emma, now leading her friend into the ante-room; "and can therefore fully sympathise with your own annoyances. I make no companions of any here, and therefore I wish you to be my friend; which, from the first moment I saw you, I felt certain you were destined to be. There is something in your face and manner that pleases me so much that I can have no hesitation in saying so. Shall we establish at once this union of sympathies—this friendly partnership of our joys and sorrows?"

"With all my heart," responded Mary, gladly reciprocating the open confidence with which Emma was treating her; "from this time forth we will cheer and console each other, and no joy or grief shall be unshared, for we will confide wholly and trustingly in one another."

"Such is precisely the kind of compact that I wanted to exist," replied Emma, earnestly; "and I am sure we shall be so happy now we fully understand the terms on which we are henceforth to meet. Mrs. Challis, with whom you lodge, and who, by the way, was a fellow-apprentice of mine, has told me what a kind-hearted, industrious, pains-taking girl you have been, and how worthy you are of anybody's esteem. But there, I know you wish to return before it gets later, and if that brother of mine is waiting for me here, as usual, we will see you home together. It will be a nice walk for me, and as the time has arrived for my own departure, we will set forth at once."

This reminded Mary that she had been followed from the borough, and it was therefore with no little gratification that she heard the half-promise Emma had given to accompany her home, and for which she expressed her warmest thanks. The preparations were soon completed, and the two friends, linked arm in arm for mutual protection, left the establishment of Madame Duchard together.

They had hardly gone a dozen yards from the door of the house, when Mary Randall, with a timorous gesture, drew the arm of Emma closer to her own, and alluding to a figure that was now crossing over the road hurriedly towards them, she rapidly whispered:

"Let us hasten on to meet your brother, for that person that you see now coming up to us has followed me all the way hither from Newington."

"Then, if we run on in this way, we shall never meet him," laughed Emma, in reply, "for the very individual that you are so anxious to escape from is my brother Henry, who has been here patiently awaiting my own appearance. But I will have an explanation of this, and tease him preciously for it," she continued, as they now waited till he came up close beside them; and she said: "So, Henry, it appears that you have been cruel enough to annoy Miss Randall by following her from the Borough, and thrusting your company upon her without it being desired. I should like to know what ingenious excuse you have ready, for an apology at least is demanded."

Thornton had no sooner glanced at the face of Mary than he recognised her as being the same with whom he had become momentarily acquainted, through the little assistance he had given in preventing the fall of the parcel. He explained away the apparent impertinence of which he had been accused by stating that he was then returning from Brixton, whither he had been to deliver an important message to his employer, who was that day dining at Mr. Parkins's villa. He added that he had taken an omnibus to the West-end, unaware that the young lady he had been fortunate enough to aid so opportunely was a fellow-passenger with him in another compartment of the same vehicle; and he concluded by expressing his deep regret that he should have caused any apprehension of annoyance to one that he was glad to find was the friend of his sister.

All this having been pronounced a satisfactory explanation and expiation of his assumed guilt, a laughing recognition of the innocence of the equivoque followed, and the three walked in lively companionship over Westminster Bridge, with a chatting commentary all the way upon the singular string of incidents that had brought them separately into the welcome society of each other.

As they went along, passing into the quieter streets, the clear and unclouded loveliness of the night gave a poetical turn to the conversation, and Thornton won the good opinion of Mary by reciting those beautiful lines which, invested by Moore with all the charms of his flowing musical rhythm, were at that moment the graceful embodiment of her own thoughts—

"Sweet moon, if, like Crotona's sage,
By any spell my hand could dare
To make thy disc its ample page,
And write my thoughts, my wishes there,
How many a friend whose careless eye
Now wanders o'er that starry sky,
Should smile upon thy orb to meet
The recollections kind and sweet,
The reveries of fond regret,
The promise never to forget,
And all my heart and soul would send
To many a dear-loved distant friend."

And then he spoke of the illusions created by moonlight, and how well all buildings, and ruins especially, looked under its soft, bland radiance, giving a grandeur and character to that which dwindled by the light of day into a mere mass of crumbling stone. He remarked how suggestive was the slightest recess in a tower, or a wall, when thrown into strong shadow—of yawning chasms and mysterious vaults, which the imagination failed not to heighten into subterranean passages, teeming with legendary lore, and having possibly the remains of some murdered monk or slaughtered seneschal crumbling away in a crypt round the corner. And then he reminded them when the bat was flapping its leathern wing in lengthened circles above the head, or the rustling of the grass showed the presence of a startled rabbit, how little it needed of fancy's conjuration to see figures passing along the obscure extremities of corridors, or to hear hollow and sepulchral voices sounding grimly through the gloom; and from all this he thought that it came

within the limits of reasonable derivation to suppose that such a power of creating wild phantasies might have originated the expression of "all moonshine," when applied to ordinary statements involving the necessity of slight disbelief.

Thus contrasting the poetical with the prosaic phases of existence, Thornton beguiled the road pleasantly enough; and when he and his sister parted from Mary Randall, whose romantic temperament they readily discovered, it was with a mutual feeling of wonder and regret that the destination was so soon reached. A promise was made by Mary that she would let Emma know all about her future arrangements, and a day of meeting was named, when she was to give a faithful chronicle of her initiation into the establishment of the Lady Adeline Temple.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CURIOUS DISCUSSION.

NOTWITHSTANDING the dreary reminiscences connected with their visit to the masquerade, it was not long before Bob Chuckers prevailed upon Thornton to accompany him to another place of entertainment, of a character less brilliant and imposing, but one that was equally novel to the unsophisticated companion of his nocturnal expeditions.

With this determination, and punctual to an appointment that had been previously arranged between them, the two met early in the evening succeeding that on which Thornton had been the escort of Mary; and with a flourish of promises from the sanguine Chuckers, that a rich intellectual treat was in store, they proceeded to the vicinity of Clare Market. Under the auspices of his cicerone, who wished to see a professional friend of his, he was here introduced to one of the cheap concert rooms with which the metropolis abounds; and after defraying the charge of threepence, made at a small wooden wicket on the staircase, they glided quietly into a seat, as the singing had commenced, and there awaited the opportunity of speaking to the personage who had attracted them into that locality.

The room was one of tolerably spacious dimensions, and was cut up into a number of boxes, in which the frequenters of both sexes were promiscuously seated, with beverages of rather doubtful concoction placed before them. As it was from this source, rather than from the price of admission, that the vocalists were remunerated, both quality and quantity were lessened as much as possible, to increase the profits of the treasury. The singers varied much, both in character and talent; some only wanting proper tuition and refinement to acquire a better reputation, and others utterly unfitted to aspire beyond the limited circle in which they moved.

On a kind of dais, or raised platform, at the further end, was the piano, confronted by a very stout gentleman with a very red face, which he kept perpetually bobbing up and down before a greasy pile of music-books, or jerking from side to side, with a recognition of those new comers who might be supposed to patronise a certain pianist's benefit hereafter to come off. After a private nod to Chuckers, who had been there before, and who was of course considered as a personal acquaintance in consequence, his attention was attracted by the landlord, who had kept up a telegraphic communication with somebody in the distance, and who now explained his reason for so doing by shouting forth, "Miss Topples will oblige." Forthwith Miss Topples appeared in a blaze of smiles, and a white book muslin dress, looking rather faded and dingy under the gaslight. Having, in a very hilarious tone, related the perplexing predicament in which "Young Susan" was placed, through having a number of lovers that were found to embarrass her selection, the laughter and applause had scarcely subsided, before a duett was commenced, in a process worth describing.

The vocalist, who was also of the fair sex, began by singing plaintively to herself from an open scroll of music that she held in her hand; and whilst thus standing alone, she looked vacantly at the audience in amazement, as it seemed, at somebody playing the flute, and who, in spite of all she could say, would persist in so doing. This continued until, as the object of the song became intensely mystifying, the flute playing gentleman, who had been answering her inquiries from behind the sounding-board, scrambled up to the platform, and, seizing the lady's hand, screamed aloud most raptnrously, "I am here—I'm here!" an assertion which, without such strong proof, was perhaps presumed to be doubtful. This was pronounced to be the celebrated "Echo duett" from "Guy Mannering," and of course every body was bound to recognise it as such.

Then came a "character song," sung by the comic singer to the establishment, and who was a great favourite with the auditory, if their preliminary greeting of smiles and inter-elbow nudges of attention were to be received as a criterion. In a jacket of boyish growth, with a red nose, large frill, and short nankeens, at the extremity of which his own tucked-up continuations of every-day wear were inadvertently perceptible, he proceeded to describe in a lively strain of doggrel the deep devotion with which he loved his mother. Every verse closed with an earnest demonstration of this affectionate regard, and his burst of filial attachment was at last wound up by an excursive dance round the platform, by which, after the manner of the ancients, he intended possibly to convey the highest sense of adoration.

After this, that was hailed of course by a vociferous *encore*, when the singer substituted another lyrical effusion, a nautical ballad was sung, and to this others succeeded likewise. But not the least amusing portion of all was the bewildering intermixture of the lines and liquids, which, accordingly as the singer or the waiter became most audible, resolved every song into a chorus somewhat after the following fashion:—

"*I'm afloat, I'm a*"—"pot of half-and-half"—"*I'm afloat on the*"—"gin-and-water warm"—"*on the fast rolling tide*"—"Two rums and a cigar"—"*The ocean's my*"—"negus"—"*home, and my bark is*"—"one shilling"—"*my bride*"—"waiter, bring me a pipe"—"*wherever I be,*" "bottled stout, thankye, sir," "*I'm afloat, I'm a*"—"screw"—"*and the rover is*"—"what's to pay?"—"*free!*"

Such a motley commingling of sounds had of course the effect of leading the attentive auditor into a perfect maze of vocal misrepresentation, so that Thornton was fully impressed with the notion that the "Merry Maids of England" were in the habit of calling for gin-and-water in copious quantities, that the "Last Rose of Summer" wanted a cigar, and that the necessary adjunct to the felicity of those who believed they might "be happy yet," was a pint of porter with the chill off.

From a train of speculations which he was falling

into in consequence, Thornton was diverted by a quiet instruction from his companion to follow him; and passing out of the concert-room, they were met on the landing by Mr. Winkins, the comic singer who had revelled in his maternal enthusiasm, and who, having welcomed Bob Chuckers with a hearty shake of the hand, proceeded, on the strength of his friend's introduction, to extend that cordial greeting to Thornton likewise.

"Done for to-night, thank goodness," said the comic singer, who was a thin spare man, with very little indication of the humorous qualities he was supposed to possess; "all as flat as possible inside, an't it? You have to hit 'em precious hard before you can get a laugh out of them; but let me see," he continued, with a sort of wavering uncertainty as to whether he was right in his conjecture, "you wanted to be a visitor this evening to the Jolly Jackdaws, did'nt you? Well, the club is just now in its prime, so we'll have a quiet drain at the bar below and be off at once."

Without more ceremony Mr. Winkins descended to the bar, and having patronised the house by calling for a quartern of "the milky way," which astronomical phrase was understood to be the comic singer's private mode of designating the juice of the juniper, he received a small sum in silver, screwed up in a torn playbill, as a reward for his professional services during the evening, and thrusting his arms within the crooked elbows of his companions, he knitted himself firmly to them, and led them out into the open street.

The public-house which the "Jolly Jackdaws" honoured with their attendance was but a short distance off, and when they reached it after a complicated passage through various courts, it was found to be a tavern of humble and moderate pretensions, but, as it afterwards appeared, held in very great repute as a place of nightly resort for the minor theatrical fraternity that constituted its chief frequenters.

Passing through a short narrow lobby, the atmosphere of which was impregnated with a strong smell of beer and spirits, Mr. Winkins pushed open a side-door at the end, and then beckoned on Chuckers and Thornton, who, having made their way into the interior of the small parlour to which it belonged, found themselves enveloped in a dense cloud of tobacco-smoke, created by the vigorously-puffed pipes of the "Jolly Jackdaws" who were therein assembled in full conclave.

The question mooted at an earlier period of the evening, and then under discussion, bore reference to the drama, and the present state of the mimic art—a question which, owing to the company comprising many who assisted in some minor capacity about the theatres, was enlivened by numerous anecdotes and reminiscences illustrative of the point at issue.

Besides a real actor or two out of an engagement, and a sprinkling of "utility" people, who, according to their own showing, ought to have been leading tragedians instead of being degraded to the duty of carrying on banners and delivering messages through managerial tyranny, there was that generally invisible personage, the man who opens the pit-doors, and who now appeared palpably corpulent; whilst the rest of the company consisted of lawyers' clerks, with a dash of amateur enthusiasm about them; and some small tradesmen from the neighbourhood, who were the patrons of the dramatic art, and who did not disdain to take benefit-tickets from the humblest among its votaries.

"The fact is," continued the speaker, who had been a check-taker, and who took up the thread of his argument as soon as the slight interruption caused by the entrance of the visitors had abated—"the fact is the whole debate hinges upon a mere question on noses."

"Noses!" echoed some of his hearers, doubtingly, not quite sure that they had caught the word correctly.

"Yes," resumed the orator, with the confidence of one who had a right to be considered as an authority; "I maintain that the nose is intimately connected with the prosperity of the drama; and I believe I may take credit to myself as being the first to make that important discovery."

"Explain!" cried two or three at once.

"Well, I have given the subject considerable attention, as you will see," said the ex-check-taker; and it is, moreover, my firm conviction that I am right. If any person wishes to judge for himself, let him go into the pit of a theatre on a crowded night, and fire his eye straight down the row in which he happens to be seated; and then, if he don't become a convert to my theory, I'm a Dutchman! I'll tell you what I've done. I have been to two theatres on the same evening—one at the west-end and one at the east-end—and from a hundred noses that I have taken promiscuously from one row in the pit of each, I have been able to draw out a regular statistical table, which I will read, if you will permit me, for the edification of the club."

With this he pulled forth from his waistcoat pocket a small slip of paper, and, referring to its contents, he exhibited the following curiously classified list to their inspection:—

WEST-END AUDIENCE.		EAST-END AUDIENCE.	
Pug-noses	2	Pug-noses	25
Grecian	6	Grecian	0
Turn-up	8	Turn-up	5
Hooked	0	Hooked	68
Askew	3	Askew	1
Buttoned	1	Buttoned	1
Roman	80	Roman	0
Total	100	Total	100

"Now, then," continued he, "we find from this table of statistical authority that the Roman nose is always scenting out the more refined and intellectual order of dramatic entertainments, whilst the hooked and the pugged are intent only upon its monstrosities. In my opinion there arises from this a curious physiological problem. The shape of the nose has long been held symbolical of the conformation of the brain, and therefore may be naturally regarded as the index to the mind, whilst the mere face is but the frontispiece, or table of contents. Now, though to take a man by the nose, in a physical sense, is confessedly to insult him, we should invariably take a man by the nose metaphysically to judge of his moral character. What, then, is the palpable restorative of the palmy days of the British drama? What is the grand secret by which we may revive the times of Garrick and of Kemble? The statistics I have given triumphantly answer the question. The number of adherents to the highest interests of the drama is manifestly proportionate to the number of Roman noses. Multiply the latter, and you increase the former. The effect will be commensurate with the cause, and the bridge that we ought to praise for carrying us safely over will be found unquestionably one of nasal origin. The mode to be adopted, whether by importation or by increasing the supply at home, I shall leave to the further re-

searches of other gentlemen who may elucidate and decide upon the theory I have advanced."

This speech had produced quite a sensation among the company, and the question, after some desultory conversation had arisen, was considered satisfactorily settled. The conversation, therefore, now took a more anecdotal turn, and as the voice of a burly smoker, who was known to be a stage-carpenter, now rose above the rest, at the far end of the room, some curiosity was excited to learn the nature of the reminiscence that he was about to unfold.

"What! served out a real bailiff?" asked his neighbour, to whom he had been previously addressing himself; "I should like to know how you managed that?"

"Ah, let us hear about the bailiff," chimed in a chorus of voices; and thus encouraged, the machinist laid down his pipe and delivered himself of his narrative something after this manner:—

"There is not one of you but would remember the actor I am going to speak of, if I mentioned his name; but as I never like to be personal, I shall only speak of him by his initial. He was a light comedian, well known to playgoers, and, through a regard for pleasant society which had transcended his means, he was always environed by duns, debts, and difficulties. For several nights, at the time this occurred, he had dreaded the personal service of a writ, which would have effectually put a stop to his engagement, and he had been compelled to resort, in consequence, to stratagem when he wanted to enter the theatre. Two suspicious individuals in odd-shaped hats and curiously-cut coats always kept watch and ward by the stage-door, and very ingenious expedients were devised to elude their vigilance.

"Twice he had been compelled to stop all night in his dressing-room; once he had gone in disguised as a foreigner with formidable whiskers and a moustache; a packing-case had received him on another emergency, and his wife's apparel had been several times in request to prevent his pursuers perceiving that 'he was a man,' and taking him for 'all in all.' The suspicious gentry were, however, not to be easily baffled, and knowing that during the run of a certain drama the comedian must always be at his post at a specified time, they redoubled their vigilance, in the fond hope that at last they should secure their prize, and that the manager would then come forward and rescue his favourite from durance vile by paying the debt and costs.

"On this particular evening the stage-door keeper had been beguiled from his post, and, taking advantage of his temporary absence, the two bailiffs managed to slip in, and, without let or hindrance, ascend the broad stone staircase that led on to the stage. Bidding his follower keep guard over the only available mode of exit, Grabbins, with the copy of the writ in his possession, stealthily made his way to the wing, where he could privately survey the proceedings of the stage, and lay in ambush for his victim. The play, however, was over, and the afterpiece, a fairy spectacle, had commenced. Convinced that A—— could not have left the theatre, the patient bailiff awaited his reappearance from the dressing-room with feverish anxiety, and at last his vigilance was rewarded by seeing the unconscious debtor emerge from behind the opposite wing, and prepare to cross the stage.

"At the very moment that the bailiff was clutching the fatal instrument in his hand, and going mentally through the process of presentation, the lynx-eyed performer caught sight of his *fetch* and drew back. He whispered a few words to me, pressed a crown-piece into my hand, and down I went underneath the stage and came speedily up behind the bailiff on the opposite side.

"Too intent on making his capture to heed what was going on behind him, Grabbins saw A—— slowly drawing on his gloves, and now made sure of a service, but, at the same instant he was advancing, writ in hand, to present it with all due formalities, he felt himself suddenly taken off his legs, and whirled up twenty feet above the boards, at a rate so rapid and unaccountable that he unwittingly performed a number of curious gyrations in his progressive ascent. A glance beneath the arms, where he felt an unwonted pressure, explained to him the whole mystery.

"The fact was, that whilst he was hugging himself up in the belief of his invisibility, I had adroitly encircled the waist of the man of law with a canvass belt, which had been previously used for the flight of a demon from the same entrance. Hooking him on to the stout wires of the 'traveller,' as we call the iron machinery that performs the operation, I gave them the signal above, and up went the legal functionary, writhing in the air, and spinning round after the style of a trussed fowl on a roasting jack. 'Let me down—let me down,' he roared; 'I will take summary measures for this resistance to the law.' 'You won't risk a theatrical capture here again, laughed A——, as he walked leisurely under his tormentor. 'This time at least I am safe; so wishing you a good evening, and a better situation, Mr. Grabbins, I beg to tell you I start for America to-morrow.'

"The light comedian passed the follower on the staircase, who was too terrified at hearing his companion's fate to offer any resistance; leaped into a coach that awaited him, started off that night to Liverpool, and the next day he was tossing on the billows of the broad Atlantic, some distance on his way to New York. Grabbins was mercilessly hoisted up between the borders, and half stifled by the fumes of red fire that illuminated the last scene, was glad to purchase his release by promising to forego all further proceedings, and defray the demands of the fly-men for this involuntary initiation into the mysteries of stage demonology."

"And was this a fact?" interrogated one of the company.

"I think it ought to be, for I saw it myself," returned the narrator; "but what I am now going to tell you is a fact which some people may think still more extraordinary. From the profits of his first six months' American career A—— settled the whole debt and costs, and sent over to the bailiff a gratuity besides."

"Well, there are some strange mysteries in our profession," said a care-worn, melancholy looking man, who had not previously spoken. "Did I ever tell you what happened one night to my dog Neptune?"

As a general belief was expressed that he never had, the melancholy man reminded them that, in what might be called the dog-days of the drama, he used to lend out a performing Newfoundland to a minor theatre; and that, in a certain piece, called "The Indian Chief, or the Dog of Delhi," his services had proved most beneficial to the treasury of the establishment at which he had been engaged.

"Well," said the man, in continuation, "up to the last scene on this particular evening nothing could have gone off better; the dog had delivered messages

with a sagacity that would have shamed a Temple ticket-porter, and had snatched a child from the burning ruins with a bravery that might have put the whole fire-brigade to the blush. But the crowning triumph was to come. The unjust usurper, who had lorded it over the 'rightful heir' during the earlier part, was now to receive his 'just reward,' and expectation was on tiptoe to know how this retribution was to be awarded.

"I need only tell those present who are uninitiated in these matters, that when this kind of moral vengeance has to be inflicted, it is customary to enclose a small piece of raw meat in the red handkerchief which the unjust usurper is always sure to wear loosely round his neck. By a stage fiction, the efforts of the dog to get at the provender are supposed, during the fall of the curtain, to afford unequivocal evidence of successful strangulation.

"Decoyed by a soft whistle from the prompter, and a feint of something being held in his hand, the dog had duly fallen into the right position at the wing, and the ruthless villain had crossed the bridge over the ravine at the back, with the red handkerchief carefully prepared for the ensuing attack of his canine enemy. The cue was the customary 'Ah! what do I see?' but Neptune, instead of rushing furiously at him, wagged his tail, squatted down upon his haunches, and looked knowingly at the leader, who was running his fingers up and down the violin with a celerity that outstripped the banjo-player in the railway overture. The unjust usurper furiously shook the red cravat with his left hand and his fist with the right, making in the meantime as much as he could of the 'Ah! r-r-r!' using the sound of the canine letter perhaps for the animal's better comprehension; but it was still a failure. No longer making any preliminary inquiry, the villain, eager to be strangled, rushed down to the footlights, and determined to discover what he saw himself. Nervously untwisting his cravat, he shook the ends of it under the very nose of the dog, but his anticipated adversary would have none of it, and with an indignant and disgusted look Neptune at once gave up business, and retired. The audience, of course, hissed, hooted, yelled, and laughed by turns; the unstrangled villain made a stumbling apology to the audience that this was the

first time he had ever known such a circumstance to occur, and the curtain fell amidst a complication of sounds that would have defied the most experienced musician to have reduced into harmony."

There was a pause, during which the relater absorbed the contents of his glass. After waiting for him to conclude his narrative, and seeing no symptoms of his so doing, Chuckers mildly asked:

"And pray, sir, what did the handkerchief contain after all?"

"What was called a mutton pie," was the answer, given in a tone of disgust; "the property-man could obtain no raw meat, so he substituted that which he had bought of a pieman round the corner."

"Dear me! what could possibly have been his objection to a mutton pie?" inquired Thornton innocently.

"Objection!" echoed the melancholy man; "the animal's instinct, sir. Though a brute, he was not cannibal enough to devour the progeny of his own species."

This instance of canine sagacity provoked the recital from others of similar cases, and after a pleasant discussion had ensued upon a greater variety of subjects than we can here set forth, the introduction of Winkins was pronounced sufficient to entitle his visitors to admittance on any evening they chose to attend again. With this agreeable understanding Thornton and Chuckers soon after retired from the convivial society of the "Jolly Jackdaws," and taking leave of their companion with a parting glass at the corner of the court where he resided, they turned their footsteps meditatively homeward.

"A remarkable man that," said Chuckers, as they waved an adieu to the comic singer; "we must get him to tell us his history one of these days—he has seen an immense deal of the ups and downs of life, and his own would rather astonish you, I expect."

How and when this biographical anticipation came to be realised our future pages will show.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. PARKINS AT HOME AND ABROAD.

To keep pace with the progress of the other personages whose history we are called upon to record, it is necessary at the present moment to glance at the proceedings of the ex-attorney, late of Lyon's Inn, whose recent successful scheming had enabled him to discard the murky office which he was wont to call his chambers, and enjoy the reward of his exertions in undisturbed matrimonial felicity at his country residence at Brixton Hill.

There is little variety in the semi-rural aspect of a suburban thoroughfare, at whatever point of the metropolitan compass the locality may be situated. The houses are nearly all alike, having stucco fronts, oblong windows, green doors with curious grim-visaged knockers, and small gardens in front, where the very flowers seem cut and trained into formal notions of rigid propriety. The smallest imagination would readily trace the existence of a terrace to one original model from which a number of subsequent impressions had been lithographically struck off.

These infantine colonies that cling on to the skirts of the old metropolis like troops of laughing children swinging lustily on to the coat-tails of their grandfather, have, however, certain peculiarities besides, which it may not be amiss to dwell upon as illustrative of another feature in the constantly-moving panorama of London life.

The suburbs form the great mart for those itinerant traders who, with cart, truck, hamper, and hand-basket, are to be met with during the day vending their commodities in every row or terrace where there exists a possibility of a demand or a chance of insinuating the supply. It is here that those persevering hawkers, who with stentorian lungs proclaim themselves the vendors of wonderful pennyworths, find the principal market for their goods, bringing the minor traffic of town to the door of every householder, and beguiling credulous buyers into the belief of unparalleled bargains. The caravan that daily performs its overland journey through the suburban desert, bristling with a formidable collection of wooden bowls, door mats, and bushy-headed mops and brooms, is a constant visitor to these remote regions, and diurnally divides the custom of the inhabitants with those variegated hearth-rugs, animated by human beings inside, that perambulate the pavement. Hither are borne those odd lumps of fish, greasy with exposure to the solar rays, that are piled up to reckless heights in dingy baskets, and supported by blue-aproned men and women vociferously inviting attention to their burden. Curious heaps of stained osier-twigs, looking like dried rainbows on their way to a meteorological museum, suddenly shoot up before parlour-windows, to the terror of nervous invalids, and are thrust into notice as ornaments for fire-stoves. Fanciful fly-cages, with triangular apertures and zig-zag borders, are fluttered over garden-railings, and, to the constant irritation of tidy servants-of-all-work, congreve vendors are everlastingly scuffling over fresh hearthstoned entrances, with a firm impression that a prodigal supply of lucifers must necessarily add to the domestic happiness of every tenant.

On this particular morning, Mr. Parkins had been manfully contending with the first outbreak of these annoyances. During the time that he had stationed himself at the window of his breakfast-parlour, vigilantly watching for the arrival of the postman, his patience and equanimity had been sorely tried by those itinerant gentry who had assailed him with their goods, in the individual belief that from the position he occupied he was anxious to become a purchaser.

Behind him was the breakfast-service, temptingly arranged, but as yet untouched, and on that warm sunny morning recalling memories of the country and its freshening associations. There was the bread, so suggestive of a corn-field, with its waving spears of burnished grain bending beneath the bracing breeze of autumn; and the butter, which, together with the milk, so obviously invited pleasant recollections of dappled cows lolling in green pastures; and the watercresses, reminding one of rippling streams, overhung by graceful willows, dipping and dangling their slender stems in the crystal brook; whilst, to complete the links of the chain, there was a vase upon the very table itself, having a bouquet composed of the choicest fragrant flowers, the sunlight quivering among the blossoms, and the leaves glistening with the morning dew. But with all these images of rural tranquillity and floral beauty, the thoughts of the individual who had turned his back upon them had very little connection.

At last, with his temper ruffled and his feelings wrought to the highest degree of nervous irritability by the repeated incursions of these troublesome applicants with "something to sell," he turned away from the window in a passion, ordered his servant—a pretty

roguish-eyed girl—to lock the front gate, and prepared to discuss the merits of the repast which had been provided, without further delaying his meal for the usual accompaniment of the letter-carrier's despatches.

The first cup of coffee had been hardly swallowed when the door opened, and Mrs. Parkins, who had been indulging in the enjoyment of a more protracted slumber, appeared in the negligent undress of matin deshabille.

The mistress of the establishment, who thus introduced herself, was a portly dame of about five-and-forty, with a very round, florid complexion, and a pair of restless eyes, that kept up an unflagging investigation into every matter that came under the scope of their scrutiny. She had been his housekeeper in the days of Mr. Parkins's bachelorhood, and by a little skilful manœuvring had succeeded in prevailing upon that gentleman to make her his wife. From the period when this eventful step had been taken, she maintained a strong authority over the proceedings of her liege lord, and the matrimonial reins were held so tightly in her hand, that the attorney had never dared to undertake any business without having first secured her sanction to its arrangements. No little juvenile responsibilities had resulted from the union, but it was a peculiar weakness of Mrs. Parkins—not unusual, we believe, among ladies of a mature age similarly situated—that every year she was on the delicate point of increasing the population. Whether these repeated disappointments had soured a temper originally mild and gentle, or whether the acerbity of her disposition arose from anterior causes, it is not easy to decide, but it is certain that her temperament was now the very reverse of phlegmatic. The slightest encroachment on what she deemed her privileges was sufficient to fan the spark of irritability into a conflagration of flaming excitement; and with the tendency to ignition of a congreve match, she was no sooner what she called "trodden upon," than off she went into a blaze.

There was something on the present occasion that had evidently disturbed her peace of mind. Those perpendicular creases between the eyebrows that so infallibly mark the existence of a bad temper—notches in the calendar of a shrew—were knitted closely together in ferocious signification of an impending matrimonial storm. Her face was unusually red, and her arms thrust a-kimbo as soon as she entered, with her eyes flashing in fierce malignity upon her husband, who was then calmly adjusting the cool relish of a bunch of water-cresses between two refractory slices of bread-and-butter, were all unmistakeable tokens of a domestic difference; and if there had been any further doubt upon the subject, her first burst of verbal energy would have effectually set it at rest.

"So, so, Mr. Parkins," she exclaimed, in that grandly polite manner with which exordiums of this description are usually commenced, "I have found you out at last, have I? The mystery of this fit of early rising you have lately taken upon yourself is at last explained, is it? No wonder that you are so fond of coming down to the parlour before the milkman has made his appearance, and have got so partial to the sight of the dawn, whilst I, your lawful wife, am snoring unsuspiciously in her virtuous bed, and little thinking of the pretty pranks you play down here during my absence up stairs!"

"Good gracious, my dear," cried the astonished Parkins, who generally tried the soothing system in his first experience of every household wrangle, "what is the matter?"

"Matter, indeed? matter!" repeated the incensed virago, raising her voice with every additional echo of the word; "I think you may well sit there, sir, like a picture of innocence as you wish to be thought like, and ask what the matter is! Did I not, as I was dressing, see the girl sent out to lock the gate whilst you were carrying on your tender billings and cooings down below, so that you might not be interrupted without having fair warning?"

"Bless my heart," replied the attorney, quickly depositing in his mouth the first instalment of the vegetable sandwich he had made; "I only asked Fanny to close the gate that we might not be so perpetually interrupted by the visits of these abominable street-mendicants and hawkers? Nothing more happened, my dear, I assure you, for I was really quite engaged in thinking of other things besides the letters I expected to be brought by the postman."

"Don't tell me, sir," vociferated the virago, pouring her coffee out with a vehement splash into the china cup; "do you take me to be deprived of my senses?"

Mr. Parkins mildly thought that if he had arrived at such a conclusion he might be pardoned for entertaining the belief.

"Am I to be considered dumb as well as blind, that you think I am not to speak about these things?" she continued, following up the attack in a shriller tone; "do you imagine I forget yesterday, when your new friend, Mr. Thingimmy—what's his name—Mr. Greene, dined with us—how you kept your eyes fixed upon her all the dinner-time, and hardly condescended to notice me once?"

"Quite an error upon your part, my dear, I assure you," expostulated her spouse deferentially; "I have been very particular in that way, very particular. What you mistook for admiration of our new servant was merely a laudable anxiety to direct her proceedings, as I was afraid, being unused to her situation, and quite unaccustomed to our arrangements, she might fall into some blunder or other which might expose us to the ridicule of our friend."

"I don't believe any thing of the kind, Mr. Parkins, and I am quite convinced, every morning since she has been here, you have got up earlier than usual on purpose to carry on your flirtations with her before I came down."

"Really, Mrs. P., this unfounded jealousy of yours is quite intolerable. I have had a dozen servants dismissed during the last three months, for no other fault than that they were in your eyes disagreeably pretty, and I will endure it no longer. That I am quite determined upon."

"And so am I—quite determined upon putting an effectual stop to your infamous career, Mr. Parkins, and that you shall see pretty soon. I will have a divorce, and make you pay handsomely for a separate maintenance."

This being the customary climax of their matrimonial quarrels, the amiable couple proceeded to finish their breakfast in silent contempt of each other; and, from the gathering clouds that descended on the brow of the mistress of the household, there is no doubt that the altercation would have been renewed, had it not fortunately happened that the long-expected arrival of the postman gave, at that moment, a turn to their mutual bickerings.

"There, Mrs. Parkins! what do you say to that?" exclaimed the ex-attorney, appealing to a dozen letters that had just been handed to him by the comely maid-servant, who winced severely under the

penetrating eye of her mistress; "twelve letters received all at once from great people, who, individually and collectively, announce themselves as being patrons and supporters of my new undertaking;" and the delighted recipient turned again to a closer perusal of the communications, at which he had before only hastily glanced.

"One fool makes many," was the terse commentary of his better-half, who apparently refused to be cajoled into acquiescence of any kind, and she calmly fixed her gaze on the elaborate seals with which most of them were impressed.

"This day, I believe," she added, with an ironical sneer, "your first meeting of the shareholders is to take place?"

"You are quite correct, my love," responded Mr. Parkins, softening into a bland benignity of spirit, as he reflected upon the agreeable prospect that these letters disclosed; "to-day, at twelve o'clock, I shall have the honour to meet the gentlemen who have declared themselves favourable to the object and intentions of the "United Kingdom General Flying Company," that has been provisionally registered, and has a capital of 100,000*l.*, in shares of 5*l.* each, with a deposit of one pound on each share."

"Well, I know all about that, and the honours you expect to derive from it; but tell me, if you can, without mixing up all this fuss about your company in the question, what good you expect to get out of this Mr. Greene that you have asked here so frequently? I am, of course, as well aware as you are that he is no more the right heir to the Greene estate than our errand-boy is; but now you have made him answer your purpose, what necessity is there to keep up your connection with him?"

"What a shrewd woman you are, my love!" rejoined Mr. Parkins, in an endearing tone, as he pushed back his cup and saucer, and, lolling against the cushioned slope of his easy chair, took a concentrated survey of her with a look of complacent admiration; "such an excellent manager, such a sagacious penetrator into the motives of us poor miserable men! What a valuable adjunct to a man of business! How blest I ought to be!"

"Come, Mr. Parkins, none of your blarneying, carneying ways with me, if you please. I think I ought to know what is best for you by this time, and I don't choose to be kept in the dark about your arrangements. Am I to know, or am I not? Don't be in a hurry—take time to consider your decision; but remember that I have a right to learn what you intend doing, and that I fully intend to exercise my privilege."

"Of course you shall know all, my dear!" exclaimed the obliging husband, who, besides being habitually accustomed to acknowledge her authority, knew her inquisitive propensities too well to venture on any prevaricating statement that might prove dangerous on future occasions when she came to find out the real position of affairs; "you shall be told every thing; I intended to do so from the first."

"Let me hear you put some of these intentions into execution then," said the lady, in reply; and with a piercing glance that banished any latent hope her spouse might entertain of mystifying her as to the real objects he had in view, she flung herself back into a listening attitude, and awaited his explanations.

"You will be quite certain then," pursued Mr. Parkins, "that I have not been idle in my endeavours to increase and promote the favourable chances of our present position. I need not tell you, my dear, that when I first met this Mr. Greene it was solely with the idea of making him my tool that I took him into my confidence, and that I was not so stupid as to do what I have done with the mere wish of conferring a benefit upon him. You will appreciate my true motive in that respect, I hope."

"Of course I knew that all along; but proceed."

"Well, then, you will see that, having found him a very convenient ladder to raise me to the height I wanted, it was necessary to make it the easiest thing in the world to dispense with his services when I no longer required them; or, in other words, having got to this elevation, I found it essential to so arrange it that I could throw down, whenever I liked, the machinery that I had made use of for this purpose."

"To be sure: all this is plain enough; but how have you prevented his turning round upon you again, and revealing these little matters which it would not be exactly convenient for you to have made known?"

"That is the point to which I was coming. You see that those papers that fell so strangely into my possession when Hawkins was my partner, enabled me to give a very plausible colouring to the claims of any person I chose to set up as being the inheritor of the Greene estate so long in Chancery."

"Yes, and a foolish plan I thought it was on your part to run the risk of letting so much money go out to get the chance of having any of it back again."

"In which belief you remained until I had the pleasure of convincing you, by the most substantial arguments, of your error," resumed Parkins, smiling at the unequivocal evidence he had afforded of his professional acumen; "but I think you will allow that for the two hundred pounds I advanced to this Mr. Greene, the sum of two thousand I have since received has yielded a pretty fair remunerative interest. Up to the last week no suspicions were entertained of the genuine nature of the documents I had brought forth, but now, from some cause or other that at present has baffled my inquiries, they are beginning to examine more closely into the authenticity of the claim. Hitherto I have received the rents without any murmurs, but a few months longer—and it may even be in less time—it is palpable to me that fresh proceedings will be taken. That fellow Jefferson, the solicitor at Manchester, who has been for years the recipient of the funds in trust, is now busily bestirring himself, and so you see it will be but reasonable to expect the whole of the careful plot I had concocted will be shattered by his confoundedly industrious researches."

"Leaving you but two thousand pounds richer for all the trouble you have taken, and in the power of a man who may seek to screen himself by implicating you?" interposed the hearer; "a pretty profitable scheme truly!"

"I have reason to be satisfied even with what has been done already," added Mr. Parkins, quietly yielding a pacifying response. "It has not answered the expectations I had formed, certainly, for we cannot even with the utmost precaution guard against unexpected contingencies, but I have guarded against one thing, and that is the chance of the false claimant I have put forth turning round and denouncing me as the instigator of the whole affair."

"Oh! you are then really not quite so foolish as I took you to be," said Mrs. Parkins, more complacently; "but how have you ensured this wonderful immunity from any charge of the kind that he may bring?"

"Simply by holding his bond for sixty thousand pounds, which was the share of the property I was to

have had when it all fell into our hands. On the very first indication of any rebellious symptoms, I shall sue him for this amount, and he must either fly from the country or undergo the wholesome ordeal of a debtor's prison; either of which alternatives will satisfy me and provide the means of relieving my conduct from further enquiry, and thus exonerate me from future hazard."

"And who is this Mr. Greene, after all? Have you any clue to his real birth, parentage, or history? How did such a personage first come into existence?"

"On that subject, I regret to say, my information is quite at fault. I met him, as I told you, one evening, by accident, when, from a certain conversation that passed between us, I was convinced that he was precisely the sort of person likely to suit my plans, and we then arranged our business accordingly. He tells me that he had been at college in his youth, and his manners show that he has mixed in good society; but as to his antecedents, beyond the proof I have had that his name is really Greene, I am completely in the dark."

"Then you only link yourself with him so long as you find your own prospects will be benefited by the connection?"

"Precisely so. At this moment his acquaintance is decidedly advantageous. Although I have worked out the whole machinery of the new bubble association, I have so contrived it, that on his shoulders the entire discredit of the scheme will fall. He will be the ostensible contriver when it explodes, as it is sure to do after the impossibility of the invention is fully demonstrated by competent judges. In the meantime, however, I shall have had unlimited control over the finances; and you know, my dear, that I am not one of those who allow foolish scruples to interfere with a wish for their appropriation."

Mrs. Parkins, thus enlightened as to the deeply-laid manœuvres of her liege lord, suffered her previous irascible inuendoes to be smoothed away under sundry promises of costly additions to her wardrobe, and other feminine requirements. Glad to escape, at any sacrifice, from the storm that had threatened to break upon his head, Mr. Parkins soon after bade adieu to the society of his amiable consort, and then, admonished by his watch, hurriedly betook himself to the seclusion of a passing omnibus, and was speedily rattling along to keep the appointment he had made in the city.

And now let us again turn to the chief feature of the suburbs on a summer afternoon — a glance into the changing scenery of a diorama, which now moves slowly on again.

The day wanes, and evening approaches.

Family men and studious bachelors, who eschew late hours and repudiate latch-keys, are now seen sauntering back to their respective domiciles, after the commercial labours of the morning, and busy themselves during the afternoon in making sanguine experiments with unknown seeds, purchased in little brown paper packets from Covent Garden market, and which, from being inscribed with curious labels, unintelligibly written, leave the purchaser in blissful uncertainty whether he has been buying vegetables or flowers. In this dilemma, bundles of firewood are sliced up and planted at short intervals in garden plots, to certify that, in the process of time, something is there expected to come up; and from these amateur horticultural performances strange salads occasionally arise, serving as a Sunday supper-treat to the friend from town, and who, having been taken round the garden by candle-light, is doomed in the innocent credulity of his faith to partake of the grass-devouring punishment of Nebuchadnezzar.

From the open windows of a few houses in the row, the subdued strains of a tinkling piano are heard mingling with the sound of small voices within; and at others, middle-aged spinsters, having matrimonial expectations, are seen to take their work to show off-able distance from the projecting balcony of first-floor drawing-rooms. The itinerant organ-boy wanders slowly forth about this time, with his little box of music slung upon his back, and massacres an endless polka for the children at play in the front garden, who scream with delight at each turn of the instrument, whilst the swarthy features of the Savoyard are distended by a broad grin, to show that he himself is quite overcome with the facetiousness of the affair and incapable of restraining the consciousness of it. So he goes on, laughing exuberantly, and swaying his body to and fro with an alarming recklessness of mirth, until a shrewish shrill voice from within summons the children to tea, and terminates the minstrel's merriment and expectations by causing the front door to be indignantly closed.

Now giggling servants, light of heart, begin to renew short flirtations with the "nine o'clock beer," and make rash promises to accompany the hero of the can to some favourite tea-garden on their first Sunday out. Then night brings on the final incidents of the day. The postman finishes his last long weary round; the pet canary is returned to the brass hook behind the parlour door; the gas is lit in the street-lamp; the distant whirl of the late omnibus is heard gradually to cease; quiet tradesmen assemble in the parlour of their favourite tavern; and night, dreamy, warm, and starlight, succeeds. Camphine lamps fling gaunt shadows on drawing-room curtains; sulky blnebottles fidget nervous chess-players by bobbing their shiny heads against smooth looking-glasses, and buzzing furiously at their reflection; long-legged gnats obstinately toast their fragile limbs in the flickering flame; hungry spiders crawl forth from ceiling corners, and dabble in syrup-stained pie-crust; the summer evening supper has to be shared among a host of insect visitors; and the period speedily arrives for early-rising folks to capture flat candlesticks and depart bedwards. One by one the lights of the upper windows become extinguished; the last shade has vanished from the blind; and the suburbs become buried in silence—a silence only broken by the stealthy tread of a perambulating policeman, or the return-footsteps of a late straggler coming home from some agreeable resort in town.

But among these later footsteps those of Mr. Parkins could not be recognised. The hour of midnight had long since passed away, and still the ex-attorney was absent from his home.

CHAPTER XXV.

BLOWING A BUBBLE.

In the long room of a well-known tavern, situated in the immediate vicinity of the Royal Exchange, there had assembled, by the time Mr. Parkins had arrived, a tolerably numerous meeting of speculators, anxious to hear and investigate the merits of the long-talked-of new invention. Besides many, who, reading the advertisement in the morning papers, had gone thither merely for the satisfaction of their curiosity, there was a due admixture of those restless

moneyed men who grasp at every scheme as it appears, and hesitate not to invest a moiety of their capital in whatever seems likely to return a reasonable percentage. In the chair was Mr. Fitzroy Greene, the self-appointed chairman *pro. tem.* of the board of directors; and at his side was Mr. Kimmerer, their future engineer, and who had been the first, indeed, to give the hint of the scheme to the persevering Parkins. Having expended the best part of a life in the invention of wonderful contrivances, and trying to obtain capitalists to patent them, he had easily and unsuspiciously fallen a victim to the designs of the man of law, and, with the promise of an excellent lucrative appointment on the establishment of the company, he had readily consented to bring forward his plan, and leave the management of it to the crafty brain of Mr. Parkins.

As this was only a preliminary meeting, previous to the adoption and issue of the prospectus, the reporters were rigidly excluded, and therefore no reference to the papers of the period will be found to repay the researches of the inquisitive. The sole report of the proceedings is that which now for the first time is given to the world.

On the table was exhibited the working-model that was to be the great "draw" to the shareholders; and as soon as the hour had struck, the doors were closed, and the chairman proceeded to deliver his inaugurative address.

"Gentlemen," began Mr. Fitzroy Greene, "you have here before you the perfected model of an invention which I have no hesitation in declaring to you is one of the greatest triumphs of which the science and ingenuity of the nineteenth century will have to boast. All the tributes I could pay to the inventive powers and vast mechanical skill of the gentleman who has bestowed the labours of a lifetime in bringing it to the present advanced stage of completion, would, I am sure, be as unsatisfactory to me as it would be unnecessary to you. We have the gratification of knowing that those eminent and practical men to whom it has been privately submitted have unanimously accorded to it their unqualified opinion of its surprising merits and capabilities. These letters will be placed before you. You will there see the estimation in which it has been held by those who even, from motives of professional jealousy, might have thought it their interest to deny its merits or doubt its practicability. It has extorted the unbought encomiums of these gentlemen; it has already obtained the patronage of the most wealthy and influential members of the peerage; it has already secured the approbation of the press—that great organ of public opinion; and now it has been resolved upon, for the more effectual, as well as more extensive dissemination of its advantages, to entrust the further development of this startling novelty in the world of art to an association whose united wealth and wisdom may co-operate to the full development of its power, and the distribution of that power through the most favourable and remunerative channels. The formation of this company, I have every reason to believe, will be not only most productive, in a pecuniary point of view, to the interests of every shareholder, but the means also of subverting the old-established, and soon, I hope, to-be-altogether-exploded notions of travelling from place to place, and substitute instead a realisation of those magnificent dreams which have hitherto been falsely limited to the province of the poet, and presumed incapable of being subjugated beneath the dominion of the man of practical science."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Greene sat down amidst considerable applause, and a momentary pause of expectation succeeded. A mingled feeling of curiosity and wonderment pervaded the assembly at the sight of the inexplicable model that was paraded before them for their inspection, and this was considerably increased by the preparations that were now made to show it in operation.

The machine was composed of metal, wood, and framed canvass, and stood about three feet higher than the table on which it was placed. It exhibited that oddity of construction which so successfully invites curiosity without gratifying it. There was an oblong case below, that contained the propelling power, and was presumed to support the weight that the real machine would have to carry. Small canvass frames were attached on each side, and seemed to govern the movements of the entire fabric, as wings assist the flight of birds; and around, about it, and beneath, were numbers of small wheels, connected by complicated lines and wires with each other, and giving to the whole structure the appearance of a model coal-scuttle, ornamented with diverging sails, and ventilated with a series of those twirling tin whirligigs that people place over door-ways, and feel fidgetty about ever afterwards as they contemplate their ceaseless clattering revolutions.

As soon as a few preliminary matters connected with this complex machinery had been satisfactorily adjusted, it was lifted up and conveyed to the upper part of the room, thence to be dispatched on its aerial journey from the hands of the inventor. At this period the chairman begged to solicit the attention of the meeting to a few words from a friend of his on the right, who had made himself acquainted with the merits of the machine, and who would now address to them a few words on the subject. Accordingly a tall, dashingly-dressed man, who had been enlisted by Mr. Parkins as an auxiliary to the cause, here made himself conspicuous, and dangling his bunch of seals with an ostentatious show of respectability, he turned over a few papers he held in his hand for reference, and fixing an eye-glass cleverly under his left eyebrow, took a preparatory survey of the audience that he was going to enlighten.

Before we chronicle the speech, it will be as well to first describe the appearance of the speaker.

Mr. Luke Sharp was a man above the middle height, with a keen, knowing visage, the prominent expression of which was of worldly shrewdness and indomitable assurance combined. His eyes were like hawk's—clear, strong, and piercing; and his under lip was habitually curled with an indication of confident self-reliance on his capabilities. Parkins had for some years known him as a man about town, well versed in all the chicanery of speculation; and having met him a few weeks previously, and acquainted him in confidence with the proposed scheme, the other entered into the project so warmly, that Parkins, well knowing the substantial services he could render, at once agreed to make him one of the directors, and admit him into a participation of the profits. The value of his aid had been already proved in the influence he had exerted, and most of the names which had been paraded as favourable to the company were those of persons who had been talked into acquiescence with its object by the irresistible persuasiveness of Mr. Sharp's tongue. Indeed, it was in this department that he was always found so indispensably useful; and so graphic were his depictions of ulterior profits, and so forcible his arguments of the little risk that would

attend the acquirement of them, that when once a man came within the vortex of his conversation he was hurried breathlessly away, and the illusion was only dispelled when the unfortunate victim found himself on the brink of ruin. Mr. Luke Sharp rejoiced in these mental conquests as a soldier would in victories won with the sword; wherever he met with one worth winning over to his purpose he never ceased till he took him captive, and the only thing that he could not take in this way was—an answer.

"It is with no ordinary feelings of pride," he began, having finished his optical survey, "that I now see around me a brilliant array of wealth, intellect, and sagacity, brought to bear upon the astounding project that it is this day our business to elucidate and submit to your notice. Our meeting might perhaps have been more numerous, but it could not have been more respectable; it might be more enthusiastic, but it could not be more encouraging. I am sure that when our plans are fully made known to you—when you see the aërial carriage itself speeding through space at the rate of one hundred miles an hour, with greater safety than the pedestrian, who limits himself to one in the same time—when you see railways superseded, steamers considered obsolete, carriages unused, and omnibuses unknown—when you see the most distant parts of the world brought within the journey of half a day, and, above all, when you see the announcement of our first annual meeting, and hear our secretary read the first annual report to the shareholders, you will then find that the greatest people in Europe would be glad to form our assembly, the most exalted potentates in the world be proud to enrol themselves among our supporters. But the advantages we hold out are limited—and very properly limited—to a certain number; and out of that number those who have the prudence to secure to themselves the earliest allotment of shares will, of course, have the preference, for they will enable us the sooner to help them to a fortune. To the intelligent auditory that I have the honour to address, any thing more than a slight reference to the vast strides made in aëronautic science within the last few years would be manifestly superfluous. From the days of Albert of Saxony, the Augustine monk, who wrote the first book on the art of flying, down to the present time, when balloons, those ingenious toys, have engaged the attention of the curious, man has always sought to establish a right of way through that light and intangible element that surrounds his terrestrial location. At last we behold the means attained, not as a mere gas-inflated machine, to be the sport of chance, but as a complete and elaborately devised piece of mechanism, which can be raised to any elevation, and impelled in any direction. You all know what electricity can do—you all know how difficult it is to say what it cannot do, but you do not know how exquisitely this wonderful agent has been adopted as a motive-power to the aërial carriage, and how admirably it has answered, and even transcended, the expectations that were formed of it."

Here there was a great desire expressed by a shareholder in the body of the room to know the principle on which it acted; but the impertinent appeal was immediately silenced by a loud cry of "question," and an encouraging shout of "hear, hear," from the rest.

"Some gentleman," resumed Mr. Luke Sharp, flourishing a cambric handkerchief over his face as he spoke, and then balancing the thumb of his left hand in his waistcoat, whilst he emphatically rested the other on the table, "some gentleman has requested me to inform him of the principle involved in its construction; but he surely forgets that until the patent is secured—which it will be in a few days—it would be most injudicious to explain the entire arrangements of the machinery; and without I did so, the little that I might feel myself at liberty to reveal would not be understood. Thus far I might inform you, that as there are two great electrical forces, the one attracting and the other repelling, it is to the latter that we have looked for our great help. We make use of the repeller as a propeller, overcoming—if I may be allowed to describe it scientifically—overcoming pneumatic resistance at an angle of impact that impels the direction of the moving body, to the neglect of that resistance which is perpendicular to that direction. The centrifugal force of the ascending power corresponding exactly to the centripetal force of the onward movement will give us an area for our operations exactly commensurate with the weight of the burden we shall have to sustain. The lucid explanation I have given, so far as my lips are at present permitted to speak of the secret of the invention, will, I trust, be considered to meet the point that has been mooted. The simplicity of it is, however, not the least remarkable of its recommendations. Besides being on a larger scale adapted to the purposes of general freight and locomotion, it is to be so concisely and compactly fitted in a smaller apparatus, that it can be attached to the human frame, and thus give every body an opportunity of transporting themselves at will from one place to another. If the opinions of former philosophers who have held these things to be morally and physically impossible are thought to be adverse to this project, I would answer, that these very philosophers themselves have always been wrong since the beginning of the world, and that any opinions they may choose to entertain are always found utterly valueless when the matter is thoroughly investigated and proved. Did not a philosopher of old suppose the universe to be encompassed with an immense zone of fire, enclosed in a sort of tube, at the extremity of which the sun was visible to us through an aperture like the hole of a flute, and which hole, by being stopped, produced an eclipse? Did not even the renowned Kepler maintain comets to be huge animals swimming round the sun like fishes, by the help of fins, and that the air engendered them by an animal faculty? Was not printing persecuted, gas laughed at, and the idea of steam transit ridiculed? Yet all have triumphed—all are flourishing; and now the crowning invention of an age, great beyond parallel in the number and importance of its scientific discoveries, is here to make the present century at once the glory and the envy of posterity."

Mr. Luke Sharp regained his seat amid a tumult of applause that continued for some minutes, and there was evidently a highly favourable opinion springing up among the auditory. This was increased when, at a signal from the chairman, the engineer released the working model, and the machine glided rapidly over the heads of the company, and, with all its wheels in motion, sailed gracefully across the room, and was caught by the adroit hands of Mr. Parkins, who was waiting there to receive it.

"Excellent!" "admirable!" "wonderful!" were the ejaculations heard on every side at this apparent proof of the genuine merit of the invention. Several pressed forward to look more minutely into the arrangements, but as an inspection of the interior was denied on the plea that publicity would be premature, the inquisitive were compelled to content themselves

with a glance at the visible portion of the apparatus, and as this was purposely made as complex and intricate as possible, the information they obtained concerning it was of the most remote and least interesting description.

Determined to take advantage of the impression that had been created, Mr. Parkins now made himself active in the business arrangements of the day. Names were received by him with gratifying rapidity, and after a list of the patrons, trustees, and managing directors, had been made out, he ventured upon soliciting the deposits of shareholders in a neat speech, intimated that chambers had been taken as offices for the company in the city, and then having proposed a vote of thanks to the chairman, which was unanimously accorded, he assumed one of his most gracious smiles, and announced that the meeting had terminated.

Seldom had any preliminary discussion gone off more glibly and more successfully than this had. They perceived a hundred shares had been disposed of already, and with spirits elated by the prospect before them, the three bubble-blowers had no sooner found themselves the only inmates of the room than they threw off the mask they had worn, and proceeded to congratulate each other on the avidity with which the bait had been swallowed.

A dinner was of course considered necessary to commemorate the auspicious occasion; and accordingly a substantial repast, that had been ordered in an adjoining room, was soon after done ample justice to by the three representatives of the company. Mr. Luke Sharp, who was in high glee at receiving a small advance Parkins had made him, got elevated over the wine, and said and did a multitude of funny things that, however, for the purity of the page in which they are alluded to, may as well escape unrecorded. Parkins plied the port continuously, and tried very hard to draw from Greene the reason of his apparent unwillingness to join in their hilarity; for he had suddenly become dull and reflective: but the attempt was unsuccessful, and the other apparently gave up all hope of penetrating the cloud in which his friend occasionally was apt to invest himself.

At six o'clock the wheels of Mr. Fitzroy Greene's cabriolet rattled up before the door of the tavern; and Dick, the small clerk that had formerly buried himself amid the dust of the attorney's chambers in Lyon's Inn, now emerged from behind it in the spruce livery that denoted his having assumed the dignity of a tiger. He was thoroughly equipped for his new capacity, with his top-boots of faultless polish, his hat studded with a smart cockade, and his diminutive form between them exhibiting those peculiar embellishments that have been aptly described as a boy breaking out with an eruption of buttons all over his body. Without stopping for a guide, he skipped down the landing, tripped up the stairs, and having got a direction from one of the waiters who was lazily flapping bluebottles off the banisters with his napkin, he knocked at the door of the dining-room, and with pert quickness reminded his master that he had punctually obeyed orders.

Thus invited, Greene rose from his seat, apologised for leaving an agreeable party so soon, regretted that another appointment tore him away, and telling Parkins that he should expect to hear from him concerning the future progress of the scheme, he bowed coldly to the loquacious Sharp, and preceded his tiger to the vehicle.

"Here, Dick," said Parkins, in a hurried whisper, as he hastened to the door, and got a nod of recognition from his previous assistant; "put this half-crown in your pocket, my lad, and don't forget what I told you;" adding, in a still lower tone, "Bring me word to-morrow where your master goes to-night, and there's another for you."

"All right," cried Dick, planting the coin in his pocket with a knowing nod, and scampering down the stairs, he shot away through the passage at the end, and rejoined his master.

There was certainly some singularity worth recording in the movements of Mr. Greene. He drove the cabriolet first down Piccadilly, then round Hyde Park, pausing near the Albert Gate, as if he had anticipated some person would be there to meet him; and having waited a few minutes without assigning any reason for so doing, he urged the horse on to a quicker pace, and retraced his road to Piccadilly. At the brow of the hill, by the entrance to the Green Park, he suddenly flung down the reins, and telling Dick to take the horse back to the stables, he jumped on to the pavement and overtook a lady deeply veiled, who was passing on before him.

Of the few words that were spoken on their meeting, Dick could not succeed, by the most adroit manœuvres, in obtaining the slightest idea; but before he turned the horse round he noticed his master was in earnest conversation with the lady, and that she had slipped her arm confidingly in his, whilst they pursued their road and their conversation together. Determined to watch narrowly the proceedings of future evenings, he took a quick impression of the lady's appearance in his mind's eye, that it might serve him for reference on other occasions; and knowing that every item of intelligence he could gain tended to his own private emolument, he inwardly resolved to make a special point in the morning of relating this to his old employer.

In the meantime, Mr. Parkins and his friend, Luke Sharp, were busily occupied with the bottle, and the former having found, when he got into the street, that the fresh air tended rather to confuse than compose his mental faculties, that had become slightly obfuscated by the extra glasses he had taken, he consented to adopt the suggestion of his companion, and take a bed at one of the inns in town. With a conscious dread of the horrible suspicions his wife would entertain, when she found that he had remained out all night, Mr. Parkins mildly proposed her health in weak brandy and water, and begged Mr. Sharp to propitiate the incensed *lares* and *penates* of his household by a similar sacrifice. From this toast originated the necessity of another glass, in which to quaff success to the new company; and then, being in a liberal and philanthropic mood, Mr. Parkins thought that his friend could not do better than follow the advice he had himself given, and the consequence of this mutual understanding was, that the bed and breakfast of Mr. Sharp were next morning included in the bill given to Mr. Parkins, and that the latter gentleman, at the same time, had a confused recollection of having, on the previous night, retired to rest in his boots.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE HEAD.

Deeply engaged in conversation, the Earl of Winterton and Lord Walsingham were on the same evening seated together in the library, that was the last of a suite of apartments situated on the first story of the earl's mansion.

The daylight had gradually softened into dusk; the rows of books, ranged in handsome cases round the walls, had become shadowy and gloomy; their own figures were growing more faint and indistinct; and yet so engrossed had been the earl in the subject that had formed the topic of their conversation, that he had as yet evinced no inclination to ring for the introduction of lights.

That subject was the possibility of supernatural appearances—a subject of deep and harrowing interest to the earl, for reasons with which the reader has been made acquainted.

"Do you think it possible," said the earl, resuming the question that he had previously submitted to Walsingham for his opinion, "that the impalpable souls of those whom our imagination has evoked may be in reality floating around us? May not the singular and occult influence which pervades the universe so operate upon the more etherial portions of our nature, that two souls, however distant, may under strong impulses be drawn and attracted towards each other? Accepting the phenomena of mesmerism as being now truthfully demonstrated, might not the same principle apply to the case I have supposed, and that consequently two friends, relatives or lovers, though sundered by many leagues, might, even unknown to themselves, meet at night in dreams, or during the day in reveries?"

"It would be certainly much easier to deny than disprove," said Lord Walsingham, cautiously; "but you are no stranger to the peculiar doctrines I hold on those subjects, and which I regret to acknowledge are so diametrically opposed to your own."

"And therefore it is, Walsingham, that I am anxious to make you a convert," rejoined the earl. "I saw you shudder just now involuntarily, and can you assign me a sufficient reason for so doing?"

"Without it was at the idea you suggested, I must admit I can give none."

"Well, for the sake of argument," pursued the earl, "let us take the Arabians for our teachers, and believe with them that this arises from a perception through the finer organs of some spiritual beings hovering around, and that the shudder is the consequence of the contact of corporeality with the invisible essence?"

"Upon my word, Arthur, you argue so appropriately

lust now, that I should find it difficult to resist the conclusion."

"And yet you are still a sceptic?"

"I acknowledge it."

"Yours is a cold and cheerless creed, Walsingham," added the earl, "and with such a belief I wonder not that you should surround yourself with the fleeting pleasures of the world. You, as a materialist, may find it difficult to appreciate the more etherial delights which the imaginative and spiritual enjoy, but you can yet acknowledge that there are influences which we feel every day without being able to account for or explain."

"And you would teach me then to believe, Arthur, that this spectral appearance by which you are occasionally visited is no illusion, but a reality?"

"A reality," repeated the earl; "that I am as fully convinced of as I am of my own existence. The tradition of our family—the testimony of my own experience, and, above all, the facts I disclosed in those letters that I wrote to you when at Paris, have long since brought me to this conclusion. Indeed, were it not so," he continued in a lower tone, "I should dread the still more horrible conviction that I should be driven to as an alternative."

"What then would you apprehend?" inquired Walsingham, somewhat startled by the deep significance the earl had thrown into the last few words.

"That there has descended with the title the hereditary curse of insanity," was the reply, given in a voice expressing such acute and painful emotions that Walsingham could not fail to be sensibly touched by the utterance.

"Let me beseech you, my dear Winterton," he exclaimed, "to banish for ever the idea of a malady that is happily not likely to attack your own strong mind; and certainly at your matured age, had there been any real cause for such a suspicion, you will yourself admit that some symptoms of a stronger character than that which you allude to would have appeared before. But rely upon it, the secluded life that you have led has been the sole originator of these ungrounded fancies. With the cheerful companionship of my cousin Adeline, you will be insensibly lured back again to earth, and the study of the supernatural, that I know has long fascinated your attention and monopolised your hours of leisure, will be abandoned for the more congenial attractions of a young bride."

"I see, like the rest of the world, Walsingham, you consider that such opinions as those I entertain are best assailed by ridicule," returned the earl; "but though we have been so long engaged in their discussion, it was not solely with the view of making you a convert to my own belief that I wrote to you this morning to call. To-morrow your cousin will become the Countess of Winterton, and as our own acquaintance has now been of some duration, and you have yourself been interested in promoting the alliance between our families, I am desirous of employing the brief interval of celibacy that remains, in asking you a few questions relative to certain circumstances connected with it."

"The Earl of Winterton need feel no restraint in continuing his former confidence—should he still think his friend worthy of it," rejoined Walsingham.

"Let me first inquire then, if Lady Adeline is informed of my peculiar belief—call it infirmity if you will?"

"Agreeable to the wishes you expressed, I apprised her of the occasional occurrence of this hallucination, and prepared her to receive any further information you might feel disposed to give from your own lips."

"And she was not even then averse to the union?"

"So far from it, that, with myself, she concurred in hoping that her presence might be found efficacious in ensuring the return of mental tranquillity."

"And you, Walsingham," urged the earl, emphatically—"you do not yourself believe that this spectral appearance to which I am subject should be regarded as the precursor of mental alienation?"

"Certainly not," answered that nobleman, "or I would have before stated my views candidly, and have refused my consent. Since you have desired my real opinion, I will now, however, frankly confess that I regard it as a kind of ocular illusion induced by some affection of the retina, and that the hereditary transmission of the same spectral appearance may be accounted for in precisely the same manner. The optical defect has descended to yourself, and in all probability will cease to be transmitted further."

"Your tone is encouraging," said the earl; "and even if I differ with you in assigning it to such a cause, I am grateful to you for the strong confidence you have expressed respecting a point that I had hardly dared before to mention. It is this that has often made me pause in contracting a marriage, lest I should involuntarily transmit that frightful malady to my son, if Heaven should bless me with an heir."

"And if your marriage should be unblessed with issue, then," added Lord Walsingham, "I believe your estate descends to your late brother's son?"

"It does so; but, unconscious of the fortune that destiny may place at his command, he is now herding with the refuse of society, at least so I infer from the last information I received concerning him. The possibility of his inheriting any portion of this property would be to me a source of constant regret, only that I feel it is too unlikely to give me a moment's uneasiness."

"When you made me a recipient of your confidence," observed Walsingham, "and, as a proof of the unrestricted faith you reposed in my secresy, imparted the exact nature of this arrangement, I never sought to inquire further; but since you have yourself broached the subject, I would fain ask the motive for this apparently inveterate hatred—a feeling that is the more remarkable in you, since there is no instance that I have ever noticed of it being extended to another than your nephew."

"Some day, Walsingham, I will acquaint you with what will be found a curious page in our family history," replied the earl, evasively; "but let me now recall to your recollection those letters that I forwarded to you, and in which, at your earnest persuasion, I unburthened my mind of that which I could not nerve myself to relate when you were present. I have your solemn assurance that they were destroyed as soon as read?"

"On my honour, they were consigned by my own hand to the flames; but surely you have no reason to suppose it otherwise?"

"The reason I ask you so pointedly," resumed the earl, "is that, from some words dropped as a threat by the rogue that I had trusted so implicitly, I feared that he might have in some manner become acquainted with their contents. What you have said, however, convinces me that it is impossible."

"You allude, of course, to your former agent, the man Jarvis, with whose nefarious conduct you have acquainted me?"

"The same," returned the earl; "on that man I placed the utmost reliance, and could have sworn to his honesty, but the rascal's apparent fidelity and clever hypocrisy completely blinded me. Now I have learned the extent of his embezzlements and the oppressive exactions of which he has been guilty, he will never dare to present himself before me again. Indeed, it ought to be a matter of congratulation to him that I permit him to escape so easily."

"It was Sir John Barrington, I think you informed me, who first unveiled the practices of your agent?" said Walsingham, inquiringly; "did you learn in what manner he had himself become acquainted with them?"

"No further than that he had been to Bradley Hall with the view of becoming its purchaser; and that he had been enabled, from his inquiries in the neighbourhood, to trace the iniquitous career of this Jarvis from the commencement. The proofs that he supplied me with were, however, so clear, that I could no longer doubt the fellow's rascality; and I am happy to conclude this statement by adding that Sir John Barrington, to whom I am so much indebted, is now the owner of Bradley."

"You have, at last, been fortunate enough, then, to dispose of the property?"

"I am glad to say I have not only disposed of it advantageously to myself," pursued the earl, "but at the same time the baronet, who has become its purchaser, has communicated to me his plan for fully developing the agricultural resources of the land, and improving the moral and physical condition of the tenantry. Of his benevolent intentions I have the highest opinion, for he seems not to have alone the mere power of wealth to carry out his designs, but the will and knowledge of the way, besides, to begin in the right direction."

"Let us hope his proposed project will be rewarded with success," added Walsingham; "though, for my own part, I am always doubtful of these attempts to realise Utopian dreams."

"Sceptical even to the last!" exclaimed the earl; "why, in what do you really believe?"

"In the delights of the present," answered Walsingham, quickly; "for those we can appreciate in full confidence of their reality; but calculate upon a minute of the future, and you throw yourself adrift on a dark sea, where reason is lost in speculation, and hope is wrecked upon uncertainty. I believe in all that I see, hear, feel, taste, or enjoy, but I care not to extend my credulity further."

"Some time I shall resume the argument with you on that point," rejoined the earl, "and we will then see which has the best of the controversy; but I have still one more inquiry to make. The young opera-dancer, who called upon you with her friend that morning when I also was your visitor, has deeply interested me. Is she still in England?"

"I believe not," said Walsingham, hesitatingly, for the question had taken him by surprise, and having concealed from the Earl of Winterton the extent of the intimacy between them, he felt reluctant, for many reasons, to state that she had that day taken up her residence at his own villa; "at least," he added, evasively, "Mademoiselle Celestine has left the apartments she occupied during her engagement at the opera, and I have no doubt that she has gone to the continent."

"I regret that she should have left without having given me the opportunity of seeing her once again before she quitted London," observed the earl, "for there was a charm about her voice and manner that was irresistibly fascinating. Indeed, as I think I mentioned to you, it was my desire to give her some more substantial proof of the interest she had created than the mere language of compliment could convey."

Walsingham made some attempt at a reply, but he laboured under too much confusion to trust himself with a long response, and he was not sorry that the conversation was now continued in the dusky obscurity of the twilight, as he felt, had his features been visible, he might have betrayed the deception he thought for Celestine's own sake it was necessary for him to preserve.

"You are yourself about to leave town, Walsingham, are you not?" cried the earl, after a slight pause in their colloquy.

"To-morrow, after the ceremony has been performed, I purpose departing to my seat in Devonshire,' was the rejoinder; "there is little worth remaining for in town when the life of the fashionable world is extinct. You are bound yourself, I suppose, to some place of refuge from the dullness of a London autumn?"

"Our honeymoon," returned the earl, "will be passed amid the gaieties of the French capital; for I am desirous of proving to Lady Adeline that I am no enemy to those pleasures which at her age possess such a powerful attraction. After six weeks' tour through Switzerland, we return to the metropolis, and content ourselves with the more quiet enjoyment of domestic felicity within the circle of our own immediate acquaintances. Such are our arrangements prospectively, and cannot you join us at Paris?"

"I would willingly do so," said Walsingham, "if I can escape soon enough from some previous engagements I have entered into; but we will speak further on that subject to-morrow. By the way, returning to this agent of yours, is it possible that you intend taking no further measures to compel him to surrender his plunder?"

"I have had some thoughts of so doing," replied the earl; "but the length of time he has been with me, and the involved condition of the accounts, have both pleaded in his behalf. The former makes me hesitate to drag him before a public tribunal; and the latter renders it difficult for me to legally prove his defalcations. Under these circumstances, the rogue must escape the punishment he so justly merits."

"Well, you must rejoice at having discovered his iniquity before the consequences had become more serious," observed Walsingham, rising from his seat to depart; "and on that score I tender my heartiest congratulations. Until to-morrow, I shall now bid you farewell."

"Stay, I will myself attend you as far as the drawing-room," exclaimed the earl, hastening to accompany his visitor; "for there are some papers there, given to me by Sir John Barrington, that I am anxious to examine before I leave England. They contain, I believe, a complete history of this man's former depredations."

"I shall, then, leave you to the uninterrupted enjoyment of their perusal," cried Walsingham, as he passed with the earl out of the library, and, repeating his adieu at the extremity of the landing, the footman attended him to the door, and the Earl of Winterton entered the drawing-room alone.

No sooner had the library been vacated, than, slowly and almost noiselessly, a dark shadow as of a human form was seen to stealthily approach the casement from the outside, and gliding amidst the plants

with which the outer balcony was filled, the figure pushed cautiously aside one of the long French windows that had been left open for the admission of air, and entered the apartment, now involved in the deepest gloom.

Moving across the thick Turkey carpet with the same careful and silent footsteps, the daring intruder felt his way towards the bureau that occupied one side of the apartment, and, passing his hand over the open desk, he began to search for some papers that he had apparently expected to find exposed upon its surface.

He had been thus engaged not more than a few minutes when the appearance of a light, seen through the chinks and crevices of the doorway, warned him that some person was approaching; and with a subdued oath at this interruption to his proceedings before his object was gained, the intruder drew hastily back from the bureau; and finding there was not time to escape by the same way as he had entered, he paused for one instant, to secure an available place of concealment, and then secreted himself behind the tapestry curtains that were suspended in thick, cumbrous folds on one side of the window through which he had passed.

He had scarcely ensconced himself in the hiding-place he had chosen before the door opened, and the earl entered, returning with the papers which he had sought, and followed by a domestic bearing with him the lamp.

The rays of light that now illuminated the apartment failed, however, to disclose the place where he who had thus had the audacity to penetrate into the earl's mansion was concealed; and perfectly motionless, and hardly venturing to breathe, for fear of discovery, he remained unheard and undetected.

At a signal from the earl the servant placed the lamp upon the table and withdrew; and then, unfolding the documents which he had brought with him, the Earl of Winterton drew his seat close to the bureau, and, arranging his papers before him, he was in a short time completely absorbed in their perusal.

Directly his eye had caught the first few lines of the clearly-written manuscript, his attention became riveted; and as he read on, page by page, the avidity with which he possessed himself of the nature of their contents was increased, rather than abated, by the progress that he made. For the whole life of his former agent, the man to whose care he had confided the management of his estate, and the one whom he had hitherto believed a faithful steward of the trust reposed in him, was here recounted in all its dark and intricate bearings; the secret springs of the insidious agent's character were laid bare, and the past practices of that individual were revealed and exposed by a chain of circumstantial evidence so confirmed and supported by collateral proofs, that the earl would have been unable to have continued his reliance on the man, even had he been previously disposed to have given a decision in his favour.

Thus was the earl engaged until the night had far advanced; the nobleman deeply occupied in scanning the nature of the communication he had received, and the watcher silently and almost breathlessly reconnoitring from his position the proceedings of the other.

Suddenly a cry of alarm escaped from the lips of the Earl of Winterton as he raised his eyes from the packet, and they fell upon the repulsive features that he saw peering out upon him from the folds of the curtain. At the same instant the lamp was overturned; a complete darkness enshrouded the apartment, and with a shriek of horror the nobleman clasped his hands before his face and sank in affright upon the desk. Almost simultaneously with this there was a rush of colder air into the room, a slight rustling was heard among the plants in the balcony; and when the servants, alarmed by the outcry, rushed into the library, they found the earl stretched senseless upon the carpet. The only reply that could be given to their eager inquiries were the incoherent ejaculations of one apparently bereft of reason.

"*The head—the head!*" exclaimed the earl, shuddering with the recollection of the supposed apparition; and, as they raised him from the position into which he had fallen, no other words were intelligible.

A physician was instantly summoned, but his endeavours to restore consciousness were unavailing. The circulation was languid and feeble, the pulse slow and irregular, his breathing short and oppressed. A cold perspiration seemed to ooze from every pore, his teeth were locked, his eyes fixed and glassy, his countenance pale and contracted, and a general tremor shook his whole frame. Search was made for the papers which the earl had been reading, but they were nowhere to be found; and the next morning the decision of the medical consultation that had taken place during the night was promulgated through the fashionable circles, and announced the Earl of Winterton to be suffering under the effects of a nervous excitement, which had induced a temporary mental derangement.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SKULL ISLAND.

Occupying a vast area at the north of the New Road, and lying between the boundaries of Camden Town and the narrow thoroughfare running northwards from King's Cross, under the appellation of Maiden Lane, there is a spacious territory marked out on the maps of the metropolis as Agar Town.

From the back of old St. Pancras Church to the sombre massive structure known as the "New Model Prison," and from Battle Bridge to the very verge of Copenhagen Fields, there is yet still existing, under the name that has been mentioned, a region that, in all the essential elements of filth, vice, and crime, may fairly outvie in those particulars every other district of the kind that can be pointed out in the vaunted capital of Europe.

Within these limits seem to be concentrated all that is nauseous to the sight, offensive to the smell, and repulsive to the mind. Scavengers and traffickers of all descriptions in animal refuse here carry on their trade with impunity, and pile up their noisome collections in obnoxious heaps as monuments of malaria, that scatter their putrid atoms into the purer atmosphere around.

From this fever-focus there daily ascends a putrescent steam that carries with it into the surrounding districts the seeds of future maladies, drawn up by the rays of a hot sun into a canopy of deadly infection, and then, condensed by the cool night air, descending like plague-engendering dew upon remote and better cared-for localities. Huge stacks of putrefaction rise up in horrible masses of corruption before the very path of the pedestrian, and refuse heaps of rotting garbage lie scattered heedlessly in the roadway. The streets leading towards this uninviting region are half unfinished,

and the houses built along the sides are more than half untenanted. Long lines of buildings not yet completed—and apparently never likely to be—meet the eye in every direction. Desolate-looking carcases of bricks and mortar, roofless and windowless, with staring apertures on every story through which the rain is drifting in, to the mockery and damp discomfort of the poor vagrant who has helplessly clambered for shelter within their hospitable walls, give a dreary look of hopeless bankruptcy to the abandoned spot. The footpaths, unillumined by gas and unprotected by paving, are at nearly all periods of the year little better than continuous quagmires of sloppy clayey mud, into which the foot that once descends is only extricated with difficulty to plunge into another swampy chasm equally as dangerous. These approaches to the spot whither we are about to conduct the reader are generally of themselves sufficient to deter the explorer in this direction from extending his investigation, and the topography of the district is as little known as though the surveyor's chain and theodolite had never unravelled the intricacy of its precincts. A ghastly animation is given here and there to the thoroughfares by the recently-painted exterior of some newly-opened alehouse, but other shops are only met with few and far between, and these—for customers are scarce about them—have a palpable struggle to maintain a flickering existence.

It is no light matter to venture on an expedition into the heart of Agar Town. The perils attending the explorer are by no means fabulous, and there is that degree of hazard in a tour through its mazy alleys that may serve to tempt the adventurous traveller who delights in having the quiet tenor of his way spiced with a dash of danger that may stimulate his progress whilst it varies its monotony. Even passing round the boundary of its circle and only skirting the worst portions, those inquisitively disposed may see enough in the course of their partial perambulations to screen us from the charge of exaggerating the description. On the day and at the time when the Sabbath bells are ringing forth from the surrounding steeples, and when a more decent and orderly population might be with reason expected, the local peculiarities are as strongly manifest as ever. You may travel hundreds of yards and pass hundreds of men without counting more than a dozen coats the entire distance. The ordinary conventionalities of apparel are contemptuously disregarded; groups of hard-favoured, famished-looking children are seen dabbling in the kennels at the doors of miserable hovels; oaths and blasphemous execrations, that jar frightfully upon the ear, are heard at every turn; and on some wayside plot of ground, blackened and scorched by the lime-kilns in the vicinity, a desperate battle between two bull-headed pugilists, or a brutal dog-fight eliciting furious demonstrations of delight from a crowd of encouraging spectators, make up the refined pastimes of the place, and form the principal relaxation in which the inhabitants are wont to indulge.

There is one part, indeed, of this lawless locality, which seems to be recognised as a kind of modern Alsatia, for all attempts to violate its sanctity are forcibly and successfully resisted. The police are daunted by the resolute band of marauders that have taken possession of this colony; even the stoutest-hearted and strongest-limbed member of the force shrinks from the certain disadvantage of provoking an encounter by himself; and you will consequently see them gathered in a formidable body when their presence is demanded, or walking in couples through the thoroughfares that abut on these scenes of riotous notoriety.

Scarcely a quarter of a mile from the Model Prison, and almost within sight of the great stone tower that faces this remarkable region, there is a spot especially requiring mention.

It is a tract of ground about two acres in extent, covered with a few dilapidated cottages and their gardens, and isolated from the other portion by a broad ditch. This completely surrounds it, and cuts off all communication with the interior except by two small wooden bridges that span the ditch at each narrowing point. After heavy rains, this barrier of fetid stagnant water swells into a sluggish brook of inky blackness, and, overflowing its banks, leaves behind a dark slimy deposit, that spreads the terrors of typhus into the miserable dwellings within reach of its influence.

A first glance at the pervading characteristics of the place will reveal little more than the same objects that are to be met with in most of the suburban haunts of poverty and wretchedness. A shattered caravan, long past service, and now drawn partly into a recess to be broken up for firewood; a few old cart-wheels, with fractured spokes, left mouldering away piecemeal round the outer rim; crumbling casks, with the iron torn off, or hanging in rusty fragments; these, with a huge clumsy swing thrust aside until the next fair-time, will be probably all that the eye can recognise; but a further investigation will lead to more peculiar and, perchance, more suspicious features.

The cottages are mostly of one story, and none of more than two stories in height. The entrance is chiefly through a patch of garden-ground in front, overrun with weeds, and closed in by a wooden gate, or wicket, usually kept fastened. The windows are nearly all broken, and mended with rags and paper stuffed into the apertures to exclude the light as well as air; and where an opening is visible, a stout bar of iron will be noticed to run along the inner side, so as to preclude the possibility of an entrance in that direction. The men who are occasionally found lounging in the doorways, or lolling over the threshold, have not the open look of the honest labourer, who battles manfully with poverty, and strives, by toil and industry, to gain the victory. There is a sheepish and yet ruffianly look about them. They are always idle; and should you come athwart their haunts, they either slink from your gaze in sullen apathy, or follow your movements with a threatening scowl. It would be no agreeable predicament for a pedestrian, who had accidentally strayed hither out of his track, to find himself face to face with one of these gentry in the darkness of a winter's night.

To this isolated portion of Agar Town there is given, in the vernacular of the district, the significant appellation of "Skull Island."

It was about seven o'clock in the evening following that on which Celestine met the Italian in the park, that two figures, coming from the back of the gas works in Maiden Lane struck aside into a narrow and unfrequented footpath leading to one of those wooden bridges we have mentioned, and emerged upon the little territory thus designated.

Stopping before the gate of a cottage, or rather hovel, for it exhibited even less promise of interior comfort than any of the rest, the foremost pushed open the outer wicket, and advancing to the door, closely followed by his companion, he gave a peculiar whistle in a low tone, as an intimation of his arrival.

Presently the sound of a heavy chain being drawn

aside announced that his signal had reached the ears of those within; and after a rapid interchange of words had taken place, the door was opened and the two were admitted.

The man who received them was Saunders the coiner, who had shifted his quarters from Westminster In consequence of the unexpected domiciliary visits of the police; and in the room to which they were now introduced were visible such implements of his illicit vocation as proved he had not given up the business with the place where he had formerly carried it on with such success.

"I suppose Slogger has brought yon here on the old errand?" cried he, as he recognised in the stalwart figure before him the person of his former visitor, to whom, in default of knowing his real name, they had attached the nickname of the "Phantom."

"Why, not exactly," was the answer given by the unknown, "for at present I have business with you of a more important nature. But let me first ask you whether I may speak freely without being overheard: if not, I will postpone the communication I was about to make to a more convenient time."

"You may take the present time for what you have to say as well as any other," rejoined Saunders with a bewildered air of perplexity; and turning to his associate, he added, "unless you look upon Slogger as an eaves-dropper, and we can easily put him out of hearing."

"Not he. If there is no one else here, I need keep this no secret from him, inasmuch as he is in my confidence, and indeed his presence during our conversation may be necessary."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Saunders, glancing suspiciously from one to the other; but a feeling of confidence in his own strength, and a look that convinced him they were not there with hostile intentions, reassured him, and he continued, "for half an hour at least we may rely upon having nobody in the crib but curselves."

"So much the better for my purpose," said the unknown, in reply, "and now the sooner I tell you what I require of you the less time will be lost. I want the services of three men, who, on the condition of having a good round sum of money paid down beforehand, will assist me in carrying out a little scheme that I have in contemplation. They must be well able to endure a sea voyage, and not indisposed to take one."

"Well, so far as that goes, I see no objection to making one myself, but I should like to hear something more before I bind myself to the bargain."

"Briefly then," continued the Phantom, "the task you would have to perform is this. To-morrow night I should require you to be at a certain spot in the Waterloo Road, to which Slogger will direct you. When you have entered a house which I have there taken, you will have to secrete yourself until the arrival of two persons who will be pointed out to you. At a signal from me you will rush upon them and secure them from either offering any resistance or raising any alarm. Thus bound you will conduct them through the vaults, with which you are acquainted, force them into a vehicle that will be awaiting you for the purpose by the old gateway at the back, and thence you will be driven to the docks. A ship will sail a few minutes after your arrival, and you must accompany your prisoners on board, and never lose sight of them until the vessel has gained its destination, which will be Australia. Have I been sufficiently explicit?"

"Well, this is a bold project of yours, I must confess," muttered the coiner, as he gazed in amazement on the speaker, "and makes me wonder who the deuce you are, that you should have the daring to propose such a thing, as well as who the two persons may be that you are going to transport in this unceremonious fashion, without putting the Old Bailey to any trouble, or the Government to any expense?"

"That you will learn in due time," was the stern and implacable rejoinder; "do you consent to form one of the party and provide the other two?"

"How much do you propose giving if I agree?" asked Saunders, doubtfully.

"Six hundred pounds among you, subject to this condition, that on your arrival at Sydney you enter at once into some honest employment, and forsake your present course of life."

"Six hundred!" echoed Saunders, his eyes sparkling at the offer; "it is a fortune. I consent, and Slogger, I dare say, will be another."

"He has already agreed to it," interposed the Phantom, whilst a corroborative nod confirmed the truth of the assertion; "the third you will have no difficulty in fixing upon."

"Guhbins is the very man!" cried the coiner, thoughtfully; and he dropped off into a brown study, as he began pondering on the new world that this had opened to his view.

A gesture of impatience from the Phantom aroused him from his revery, and he then hurriedly exclaimed, as if he had forgotten the most important part of the agreement,

"But how is this to be paid?"

"Three hundred pounds shall be in your possession before you start, and the remainder shall be given to the captain, who will hand over the amount directly the vessel gets into port."

"I'm satisfied," rejoined Saunders; "and if I hesitated about it, as I have done, it was only because I was afraid of a trap."

"You had no reason to expect that from me," answered the unknown, "for I could have put the police on your track long ago had it been my intention to have done so. You cannot have forgotten already that, when we first met, I told you that I knew of a certain murder committed in a lonely copse in Lancashire; and that, if a word from you should make it necessary, I could point out the grave of the murdered victim, and, stripping it of its leafy covering, denounce the name of him who struck the fatal blow."

"How you came to know this," said Saunders, abashed by being reminded of the event, and averting his head in consciousness of his guilt, "is a mystery that always confounded me. There was not a witness to the deed, and, unless the man himself could have come to life again, there was no evidence against me."

"The guilty have an accuser always near them," responded the other, "and the knowledge of this should sink deeply into the heart of those who tremble on the verge of crime. Did I not know that your repentance and remorse have been real, I should not have waited until now to have asked for retribution."

"I confess he fell by my hand, and bitterly have I since regretted it," added Saunders; "but it was done under the momentary effects of passion, and I meant not to take his life. We were both poachers—had quarrelled that day about the division of the game we had snared—and exasperated by his threats, I struck at him with a knife I held in my hand, and he dropped down senseless at my feet. There was a narrow pit dug at his side, and terrified at the idea of

being apprehended as his murderer, I threw the body into the hole, and covered it over with the branches and leaves that I found about the place. Poor Oliver! I would have given my own life gladly an hour afterwards to have seen his life restored."

The man uttered this with a demonstration of deep feeling that showed he was sincere in what he had said. Down the rough furrows of his cheeks tears coursed their way unbidden, and, as the recollection of the act he had committed became more vivid from dwelling on the associations connected with it, he gave way to an involuntary paroxysm of grief.

"I need have no further proof of your sincerity," interrupted the Phantom in a kindly tone, as he saw the evident sorrow of Saunders; "and now I have tested the truth of what you before asserted to me, I will at a word remove the load of anguish from your soul. About a quarter of an hour after you had fled from the scene of your supposed crime, accident directed me near the spot where you had buried the body. A slight rustling sound among the crackling twigs made me examine further, and removing the branches and dead leaves that had been strewn over the pit, I saw to my horror a bleeding form stretched before me. A touch convinced me life was not extinct, for the face was still warm, and the action of the pulse had not ceased. The village was not far distant; I bore the poor fellow thither, whose consciousness returned with the cool air that fanned his brow, and the blow, though deep, was found to have been no fatal one. In short, John Oliver still lives, is now with me in London, and to-morrow you shall see him, for he is to be your companion on the voyage."

During the above explanation Saunders had been labouring under strong and violent emotion, and as he listened almost breathlessly to the recital, his features underwent rapid alternations of expression. Surprise had hitherto held him speechless, but no sooner had the other concluded, and he found that the companion of his poaching expeditions, of whose death he had reproached himself for being the cause, was still living, than his joy displayed itself in the strongest manner. He poured forth his thanks to the Phantom in eager haste, and testified the depth of the obligations he felt by the most earnest protestations of gratitude.

"It was in the belief that I was stained with this crime," he continued, "and that my hands were imbrued with the blood of a fellow creature, that first made me what I am. Henceforth I enter on a new career. Though gladly I should take advantage of the offer you have made me, I should therefore shrink from the task you have proposed if it would involve me deeper in the snares of guilt, from which I am now only anxious to escape."

"Fear not, my friend," rejoined the unknown, "that what I am asking you to do would interfere with the better principles that I am now rejoiced to see have been again awakened in your breast. In performing what I wish, strange as my plan may now appear to you whilst you are ignorant of my motives, you will be in reality furthering the ends of justice and ridding society of a couple of pests that have been too long suffered to practise their iniquities with impunity. I had long sounded Slogger on the subject, and saw that he was as glad of obtaining a chance of reformation as yourself. I got him to conduct me hither, and if other arguments had failed I was convinced that when you heard the disclosure it was in my power to make, your scruples would vanish, and you would give me the assistance I required."

"And is it possible," said Saunders, "that this man, who has been so notorious a culprit, will consent to abandon his evil ways so readily?"

"Good pay and great persuasion will do wonders, Mr. Saunders," said Slogger, with a grin of affirmation; "and as a proof I'm in downright arnest, I have promised this gen'lman to give up cracking a crib that Gubbins and I were going to do between us to-night and told him all the particklars about it."

"Hush!" interrupted the coiner, as his quick ear caught the sound of approaching footsteps, "there are those coming here who would not be so likely to fall in with your views. This house and the next are their regular haunts."

"Then to-morrow evening I shall be expecting your arrival at the place you have appointed," cried the Phantom, throwing his cloak round him and crossing towards the door; "I shall leave Slogger and yourself to arrange who the third is to be, and to his direction you may safely entrust yourself."

A parting salutation was exchanged, and Saunders had no sooner opened the door to allow his visitor to depart, than Gubbins, accompanied by Jacopo, the organ boy, made his appearance. The candle that the coiner held in his hand was, however, so dexterously managed, that the light fell only upon the features of the new comers, and the Phantom was therefore enabled to pass out unseen. Too much accustomed to witness the rapid movements of the fraternity to heed the circumstance of a departure so quickly following their arrival, Gubbins contented himself with carelessly asking who it was, and receiving an evasive reply from the coiner, no more was said until the cunning urchin who had come to detail the future operations of Borelli had finished his story.

Leaving them engaged in listening to the revelations of the insidious Savoyard, we must follow for a moment the footsteps of the unknown, who after quitting the abode of Saunders struck into the path leading across the bridge, and pursued his way to the turning which he had traversed on his first approach. It was by this time quite dark, and he was hesitating as to whether he was in the right track, when, on the other side of a tile-kiln by which he was passing, the whispered tone of two persons apparently in earnest conversation reached his ear. Struck by the familiarity of a voice that he fancied he had heard before, he paused to listen.

The two thus conversing were Borelli and the Italian.

A few minutes elapsed, in the course of which he was completely spell-bound by hearing certain allusions to a diabolical project that the two ruffians were contemplating. Feeling that this rewarded him for the delay, he stopped not to gather further information, but quickening his progress through the Alsatian territory, he passed hurriedly beyond its limits, and, with a change of direction caused by what he had so fortunately overheard, he entered town by a different route to that which he had originally intended to have taken.

Utterly unaware that a listener had been near them, the two who had been thus conversing under the shadow of the tile-kilns moved about a hundred paces forward nearer the bridge, still exchanging a few remarks as they went along.

"You will find it is as I have told you," cried Bazzini; "the boy is playing you false, and selling to others, who pay a larger sum for its possession, the information you think alone to have. You have noticed yourself he has given you the slip every night

at a certain hour, and I think you might have followed him before this and seen where he went to."

"If it is so," exclaimed the padrone with a fearful oath. "I will stop the rogue from betraying me again, if I have to pluck his tongue out by the roots for it."

"Look, is not that him coming forth?" said the Italian, indicating the faint outline of a small figure that was observed to emerge cautiously from the wretched habitation where a light had just made itself feebly manifest through one of the windows.

"How savage Tony would be if he knew what I had been telling you—wouldn't he?" cried a shrill voice through the darkness, in reply to some one who was standing upon the thresbold; "he must think I'm a stupid to do just as he tells me, and not get something out of it." And this was followed by a coarse exulting laugh, and a rapid exchange of the words, "Good-night."

"It is Jacopo, and he has betrayed me," muttered Borelli in a threatening tone, as the rapid tread of footsteps came towards the bridge, on the other side of which the padrone and the Italian were awaiting the boy's approach. "Diavolo, but he shall suffer for this."

The night was perfectly dark. A murky canopy of clouds extended overbead in every direction, and the lurid glare of the lighted streets of town was reflected back from the dense sky in a thick mass of vapour, that, tinged with a red, unearthly lustre, swept southward over the crowded range of buildings. The presence of Antonio and Bazzini at the foot of the wooden bridge was therefore unnoticed, or not to be distinguished from the inanimate objects that rose around them. Accustomed to the path, Jacopo came whistling on with a merry heart, thinking of the cunning way in which he had deceived Borelli, when, at the very instant his foot was on the plank, the padrone sprang forward, and, seizing him in his powerful grasp hurled him over the rails, and sent him down with a heavy splash into the broad ditch that was beneath.

So sudden and unexpected was the movement that the Savoyard had no time to utter a cry, for when it rose to his lips it was stifled by the putrescent soil in which his head became instantly submerged by the force of the fall. The water in the dyke was not more than four feet deep, but the accumulation of mud at the bottom was sufficient to answer the murderous object of the padrone; the boy had been flung violently into the poisonous slime, and before he could extricate himself he was suffocated.

Borelli and the Italian loitered by the spot to see whether they had been observed, or if the body of their victim came to the surface, but all was quiet; and growling satisfaction at the vengeance he had taken, the padrone and his companion went slowly back together in the direction of Battle Bridge.

A few days afterwards an inquest was held on a young Savoyard, who was found by a labourer at the tile kilns, lying in a stagnant pool that had been partly dried up by the heat of the weather, and which abutted on the ditch that surrounded the district called Skull Island. There were no marks of violence on the body, other than those contusions evidently occasioned by a fall; and as the erratic habits of the race of itinerant organists to which the boy belonged were well known, the discovery produced little excitement; and it was decided, by a verdict of "accidental death," that in the darkness of the night he had mistaken the track, and fallen into the place where he was discovered.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

In the meantime Celestine had become the inmate of Lord Walsingham's villa; and, surrounded by all the luxuries that her opulent lover had placed at her disposal, she experienced no feeling of regret when she contemplated the change in her condition. On the preceding night she had taken her farewell of the profession of which she had been so great an ornament, and she now saw herself the mistress of a mansion that was furnished with the most studious attention to her comfort, and replete with all that could contribute to her happiness.

Unwilling to allow any cause to exist that might produce that publicity which the opera-dancer appeared so anxious to avoid, Lord Walsingham had withdrawn the greater portion of the domestics to his country seat, and there consequently remained but a few servants attached to the establishment, whose services were indispensable, and on whose secresy and fidelity he could with confidence rely.

Awaiting the arrival of her admirer, who was that evening to claim for the first time the unrestrained enjoyment of her society, Celestine was reclining on a couch in one of those elegant apartments that opened on to the lawn, and to beguile her solitude she had chosen a volume from the well-assorted library that Lord Walsingham had left at her command. The golden time-piece on the mantel struck the hour of ten. It was the hour when Lord Walsingham had promised to be with her. She lifted her eyes towards the dial to assure herself of its indication, and then once more bent them towards the novel which she held listlessly in her hands. A lamp, of costly workmanship, placed upon a table near her, shed a soft mellow radiance upon the book which she was perusing, and lit up the outline of her symmetrical form in the reflection of a spacious mirror opposite. The curtains of the windows that looked out upon the grounds were not yet drawn, and the leafy branches of the tall elms that skirted the river boundary were seen dimly across the lawn, bending to and fro in the night breeze, and looming forth in masses of shady foliage against the star-lit sky, in which the summer twilight still lingered.

But the thoughts of the fair peruser were not with the page on which her eyes were bent, and often had she turned from the book to survey with conscious pride the image of herself as mirrored in the glass, or, gazing towards the window, pensively watch the radiant star of evening that was slowly rising up behind the trees.

The recollection of that memorable interview with the Italian in the park—the feeling of repulsion with which she had listened to the claims he had put forth—the horror with which she reviewed the possibility of his really being what he had represented himself, and the dread that still weighed heavily on her mind of his bringing forward the proofs that he had threatened, forced her into a train of reflection that dispelled the more agreeable anticipations she had formed, and left a depressing influence on her spirits.

Notwithstanding the hope she cherished that in her present seclusion there was a probability of escaping his persecution, a natural feeling of aversion to the man made her tremble at the idea of meeting him again, and she shuddered at the risk of revealing all to Lord Walsingham, lest he should despise her for her lowly origin, and spurn her on account of the ruffian who had arrogated the authority of a parent.

In addition to this, there was another source of apprehension she felt, and which the present unprotected state of the mansion brought vividly to mind The conversation of the two burglars, whom she had overheard planning a robbery in the very villa where she now resided, was not regarded by Lord Walsingham, when she narrated the circumstance to him, as being of that serious importance which she had herself attached to it. But now the removal of the greater part of the servants and the lonely aspect of the place suggested to her that the danger might not be after all imaginary.

There was a rustling noise in the shrubbery by the window near which she was seated, and Celestine nervously associating the sound with the idea that was at that moment uppermost in her thoughts, started involuntarily from the couch, and looked out into the pleasure-grounds beyond.

As she did so, she caught a distinct glimpse of a figure crossing the narrow gravelled path, and her fancy, roused to the utmost intensity, pictured the intruder as being one of the robbers whom she had previously been fearing. Her hand was upon the bell, and in another instant she would have summoned assistance, but at that moment the door opened, and Lord Walsingham himself clasped her in his arms.

"Oh, my lord!" exclaimed Celestine, nearly breathless with affright, as she hurriedly drew the curtains across the window; "how delighted I am at your arrival, for I have been just now so dreadfully alarmed."

"At my absence?" inquired Walsingham playfully, as he wound his arm round her glowing waist, strained her to his breast, and bestowed a rapturous kiss upon her lips; "did I not make a promise to be punctual; and have I not fulfilled it?"

"It was not a fear of your inconstancy," said Celestine, smilingly, and reassured by her lover's presence: "of that I had no apprehension; but a foolish timidity, a nervousness that I am now almost ashamed to confess, overcame me as you entered the apartment, and I longed to be relieved from my solitude."

"You have already, then, found reason to regret the sacrifice you have made?" observed Walsingham, looking earnestly into those radiant eyes that were

turned so eloquently towards him; "am I to proclaim myself a stern tyrant, and keep you helplessly enthralled; or, in a more generous spirit, shall I release you from your unwilling bondage, and leave nothing fettered but my heart?"

"Oh! Walsingham," exclaimed the danseuse, her head drooping on his shoulder; "it was not that I sighed for the return of that life and gaiety to which I have been accustomed, nor that I regretted the absence of those hollow praises to which I have been compelled to listen. But all is here so quiet, so still, so different to the animated scene in which I have so long participated, that, despite my efforts to resist it, I have felt my spirits saddened by the contrast. A moment ago I even imagined that your own figure crossing the gravelled walk was that of a robber."

"Still dwelling on that strange fancy, then," said Walsingham, laughing away the fears that her adventure had excited; "must I again assure you, my charming Celestine, that you have no reason for alarm? The protection that these bars and bolts afford against a midnight intruder are not to be so lightly estimated; and if you require a still greater proof of the security of the mansion from depredation, I may tell you that, however adroitly any attempt of the kind might be made, the vigilance of my own domestics would effectually prevent it taking place undiscovered."

"It is impossible to continue sad when your lordship is present," responded the fair girl, yielding to the ardent caresses that Walsingham bestowed. "I feel a confidence when you are at my side, that immediately restores my self-possession, and those timorous fancies for which you chide me are dispelled as by a charm."

"Let us, then, surrender ourselves to its magical influence," returned the enraptured nobleman, "and give up every thing henceforth for the study of each other's happiness—the enjoyment of that real world of bliss which it is a pleasure to create and a paradise to inhabit."

"I am thine—thine alone," faltered the blushing girl, as she sank into the arms of her lover. "With thee I feel will be realised on earth all the happiness that my wildest dreams have taught me to expect. To thee, Walsingham, I give a heart that bears no image but that thou hast engraven on its spotless shrine; it can receive no impress but from thee. In return, I ask from you the same devotedness—the same eternal constancy."

"I swear that both in my devotion and my fidelity you shall find no change," answered the nobleman with impassioned energy, as he smothered her face and neck with ardent kisses. "Never till now, my own Celestine, did I know that there was a prize to be sought beyond the possession of beauty, but you have made me acknowledge a greater value in your sex. I love you not only for those exquisite charms of your person, in which you have no rival in my eyes, but also for that more lasting attraction, the qualities of your mind. Daily as I came to know you more, I learned to love you better; and now he who, like a wayward butterfly, has flitted through the May of life in careless sport from flower to flower, has found the fairest blossom in his wanderings, and on this he means to rest himself content for ever."

"And yet," cried Celestine, looking up earnestly into the face of the nobleman, as, with one hand reposing on his shoulder, she pushed back her banded hair, that had overshaded her brow, "and yet you would refuse to give that sanctity to the tie that would be my best assurance of that feeling being permanent."

"It is the weakness of the class to which I belong, and not the result of my own wishes," rejoined Walsingham. "There is a conventional barrier raised by the higher classes of society, through which I have not the moral courage to break. To preserve the purity of our patrician descent unimpaired, the partner I espouse should be of equal birth and family with mine, and from this rank only could I choose a wife. There was not one among the many whom I had seen that approached the standard that my ambitious hopes had raised; none till I saw you that roused my admiration into passion. Thus, Celestine, I have remained till now unwedded; and thus it is that, since I cannot love where I should marry, I must be doomed by circumstances never to marry where I love."

"Your candour, my lord, gives me confidence in your sincerity," sighed the girl, as the words sank deep into her memory, and the last hope to which she had clung, of revealing to him her supposed origin, gave way under the blow which he had unconsciously inflicted. "I know you would shrink from one of humble parentage."

"Never need I on that account be a less enthusiastic lover of yourself," added Walsingham; "for happily, though neither title nor wealth may have favoured your ancestry, Romani has assured me that you are not of ignoble extraction, and therefore even regarding you only as a companion, the strongest supporter of those prejudices, absurd as they may seem, would not suffer from the union that exists between us."

"And did Madame Romani say no more than this?" asked Celestine, timorously, and scarcely daring to encounter the look that she invited.

"Nothing," answered the nobleman, responding to her question in a tone of surprise, "nor did I offer to inquire further; but now, since you have alluded to the subject, I may remind you ——."

Fortunately the deferential knock of a domestic at that moment interrupted the observation that Walsingham was about to make, and spared Celestine the confusion that would have accompanied its utterance. The footman, who had awaited the reply of the nobleman before he intruded on their privacy, now entered with a note upon a salver, and added that the bearer left it with an injunction to be delivered instantly, as it was from the Earl of Winterton, and upon business of an urgent nature.

"This is indeed unfortunate," remarked Walsingham, as he rapidly glanced at the contents. "I have here an urgent summons from the Earl of Winterton, requesting me most earnestly to lose not a moment in seeing him, as his life is hourly despaired of, and he has some communications to make of a most important character."

"Oh, fly at once to the bedside of your dying friend!" exclaimed Celestine, her sympathy being deeply aroused by the painful tidings thus conveyed; "let not an instant be lost in preparation, and suffer no consideration for me to hinder your lordship from paying that duty which friendship requires from you at this unhappy emergency. What can have caused this sudden indisposition?"

"There I am myself at fault," said Walsingham, vainly seeking to relieve his perplexity by a re-perusal of the letter; "I parted from him in his library but a few hours ago, and he was then in the enjoyment of his usual health. Some accident, I am afraid, must have happened. It is strange too," he continued, turning the folds of the paper over, "though this ur-

questionably is in the earl's handwriting, I can find neither the usual cipher nor the seal attached."

"Doubtless the mere result of haste," observed Celestine, "and the unfortunate circumstances under which the note was written. We should not expect formalities to be adhered to on such occasions. Pray let no thoughts of me retard compliance with the wish he has expressed."

"Has the messenger gone?" inquired Walsingham, addressing his servant, who waited at the door for further instructions.

"He quitted the house immediately after he gave me the note, your lordship," was the reply.

"Was it one of the earl's usual attendants who brought it?" pursued Walsingham.

"No, my lord," answered the footman; "he was so closely wrapped up that it was difficult to catch a sight of his face; but I know from his speech and figure that he has never been here before."

"Get the carriage ready instantly, Burton," resumed the nobleman, after a brief consideration, "I will away at once; and let me know when you have brought it to the door."

The footman bowed and retired; and Walsingham then turning towards Celestine, exclaimed:

"This is truly a provoking as well as painful interruption to the happiness we were enjoying; and the more so as I cannot help entertaining some doubt about the truth of the contents of the letter. It is not, however, a time to hesitate as to the course I should take, when one hour will either set at rest my suspicions or confirm them, and enable me to return to you with an assurance that I have done all that was required."

"In one hour, then, under any circumstances, I may depend upon your return?"

"It is now nearly eleven," he observed, referring to the time-piece; "at midnight, or a few minutes after, you will see me again."

The announcement of the vehicle being in readiness hastened his departure, and after a hurried embrace Walsingham entered the carriage, and was driven rapidly off, as Celestine, who had followed him to the threshold, returned more cheerless and contemplative than ever to the apartment where she had sat the long evening through, drearily watching for his arrival.

She had, however, the consolation of now knowing that she was not forgotten, and that the hour to which he had limited his absence would soon pass away, and restore him to her arms. In the same position as before, with the curtains falling in full folds behind her, she once more assumed a reclining posture on the couch, and in the pages of the volume sought to obtain forgetfulness of time. A few minutes sufficed to convince her of the futility of the effort, for she found it impossible to fasten her attention on the book. An uneasy listlessness stole over her as she read, and made her thrill at the slightest sound; and the consciousness that she was now again alone in the mansion, with only two female domestics within call, heightened the intensity of the nervous trepidation that crept resistlessly upon her. In vain she strove to conquer the timorous fears that invaded her mind. The more she struggled to emancipate herself from their dominion, the more deeply she felt herself entangled; and the greater the energy with which she tried to banish her apprehensions as unfounded, the more intense was the dread that accompanied the reaction.

A quarter of an hour had thus elapsed, when, unable longer to contend with the vague idea of impending danger that completely absorbed every other feeling, Celestine determined to summon her maid to bear her company; and, ashamed to avow the real cause, she rested pensively upon her arm before she rang the bell, to consider what frivolous excuse could be framed as a reason for requiring her presence. Whilst thus pondering on the plea that she should put forth, her eyes carelessly wandered towards the spacious mirror that was on the opposite side of the apartment, and there they became riveted as if by some supernatural power.

For in this reflection she saw the curtains, that had been drawn closely together over the window behind her, vibrate as if a person had concealed himself on the other side of them, and then, as they slowly parted noiselessly in the centre, she beheld, as in a vision, transmitted through the same medium, a human head rise grimly up between. Breathless, with every fibre of her body wrought, as by electrical action, to the acutest sensibility, Celestine kept her gaze, like one spell-bound, on the image that rose before her. With the remembrance of the legend Walsingham had narrated, a new terror began to dawn upon her distracted mind; but the outline of a figure, that developed itself with the same stealthy and automaton-like movements, soon convinced her it was a real and not an imaginary visitor that she had to dread.

The light fell more fully upon the features as the intruder glided from the shadow of the recess, and then did Celestine, watching the reflex of that well-known face, start with a convulsive effort from the couch; but a hand from behind, fastening itself round her wrist, drew her back as with a giant's grasp, and the scream that would have issued from her lips was stifled by the sudden and stupefying influence that at that instant seemed to paralyse her entire frame. With a choking cry, so faint and feeble that it was scarcely heard even within the walls of the room, she waved her hands wildly before her to shut out the horrible image, and then a deadly paleness overspread her cheeks, and she sank back inanimate on the couch. The agony of intense terror had proved more than her delicate organisation could support, and, with her brain excited to the very verge of madness, Celestine swooned away.

Feebly were her perceptions restored, and then not until a lengthened interval had elapsed. How long she had thus remained she knew not, but by slow degrees her consciousness returned, and she awoke as from a trance. A chilling tremor had taken the place of that feverish flush which she remembered to have felt, and thoughts came flitting back as indistinct and shapeless as when the first ray of morning sunshine disperses the dream-spectres of the night.

But around her there was a complete darkness, for which she felt at a loss to account. The couch convinced her that she was still in the same apartment, but raising herself from her recumbent posture, and passing her hand over the table near her, she found the lamp was not extinguished, but removed. By whose agency this had been effected, whether the household had been alarmed, or if Walsingham had yet returned, were conjectures that she could not help forming, and yet she knew not where to gather a reply. One startling and overwhelming certainty alone presented itself. She had been visited by the man whom, of all others, she had sedulously striven to avoid, and he had entered that apartment; perhaps, even, was still within it.

Tortured by a hundred different surmises, and determined at all hazards to relieve the horrible suspense which she was enduring, Celestine carefully made her way to the door, and she was on the point of opening it, when a ray of light streamed in beneath, and she drew involuntarily back as the sound of footsteps cautiously descending the flight of stairs on the other side fell upon her ear.

The door opened, the light again pervaded the room, and Pietro Bazzini, the Italian, again stood before her.

"So, so, my pretty daughter," he said, in a low penetrating tone, that made the shrinking form of Celestine shudder as she heard it, "you have been wise enough, I find, to take the hint I gave you, and cunning enough to choose a good victim to begin with. By all that's lucky, my girl," he continued with a coarse laugh, "you have picked out a capital home, and having been all over the house whilst you were getting the better of the fright I gave you, I can speak of the riches and good taste of the owner from experience as an eye-witness."

"Wretch!" exclaimed Celestine, whose first alarm at his entrance had now changed to rage and indignation at his audacious presence; "instantly quit this house, or I will bring the inmates to my assistance," and, as she spoke, her hand was placed upon the bell.

"Ring away," answered the Italian with taunting bitterness, "I shall want some refreshment after the long journey hither I have taken, and, as I have had some trouble to find you out, you will oblige me by having the tray put upon the table."

"I now give you the opportunity of escaping unseen by the servants," cried the girl with rapid utterance, still retaining her hold upon the bell-rope, and unmindful of the other's intimation; "as you entered this place, so, doubtless, you can find a way to quit it without passing through the hall; but if you delay a moment longer, you incur a danger from which I cannot save you. Decide, and quickly, or the risk will be yours."

"It is a risk I am quite willing to venture," retorted Bazzini, coolly taking up his position on the very couch where Celestine had reposed, and sprawling his gaunt limbs over it; "I know well enough that there are but two women left in the villa besides yourself, and they are far away from this part of the building. Come, the wine."

"Wretched man, will you still brave the danger of being discovered here?" urged Celestine, as, now emboldened by the emergency of the case, she released her hold of the bell, and crossing the room, drew the long curtains aside; "look, these windows open on to the lawn, a pathway to the right will lead you to a wall over which you may easily climb, and in a few minutes be beyond the reach of pursuit."

"I know this, too, for it was by that route I came into the grounds," observed Bazzini, with the same careless indifference; "I am obliged to you for the information, but have no occasion to avail myself of it. When I leave here, I should like it to be by the direct way, and a servant to attend me to the door."

"Ha!" ejaculated Celestine, her eye glancing at the time-piece on the mantel, "it now wants but a few minutes to twelve; at that hour Lord Walsingham will return."

"So much the better," cried the other coolly, stretching himself on the couch, "for I shall then be able to have a little conversation with his lordship before I bid adieu to his mansion."

"How! *you* dare to accost Lord Walsingham! Think you that he will calmly endure this intolerable insolence?"

"And do you think, Beatrice Bazzini," exclaimed the Italian in reply, leaning forward on his arm and fixing his piercing eyes intently upon her, "that his lordship would dare to receive me otherwise than as a welcome guest, when he has done me the honour of taking my daughter for his mistress?"

"No—no—unfeeling as you are, you cannot be so cruel as to speak to him thus?" almost shrieked Celestine, as she now comprehended the apparent reason of the Italian's visit, and trembled for the consequences that would ensue; "if you do not value my position, think of your own. I do not ask you to spare my feelings, for of any act of kindness or consideration you have shown yourself incapable, but I ask you to study your own interest—fly from here at once, and I will purchase your absence with any means in my power."

"I shall make a better bargain if I stop till Lord Walsingham returns," said Bazzini, with calculating nonchalance; "he, as well as yourself, will then have to bribe me to secrecy."

"Then my resolution is taken," replied Celestine, drawing herself up to her full height, and from the very imminence of the peril that threatened her deriving a firmness that was unusual in her disposition. "I will denounce you as a man who has lived by the most unscrupulous extortion, whose crimes have driven him from one country to prey upon the inhabitants of another, and who, having successfully pursued a career of guilt and infamy that has given him a confidence in his unbounded wickedness, now seeks to eclipse his former misdeeds by a scheme of perjury and fraud that he dares to direct against the innocent as well as against the wealthy."

"Say on, my pretty accuser," returned the Italian, scornfully; "the character is not altogether wrongly drawn; but remember," he added, in a sterner and more impressive voice, "that the greater criminal the father, the deeper and more lasting will be the daughter's shame."

"You have no proofs to convince the world that you are what you represent yourself to be," said the girl, undauntedly; "I do not believe in the assurance you gave me that those proofs existed, and were ready to be brought forth. At all hazards, for what you have done you will have to answer; and as for your witnesses, on their production I am willing to abide the issue."

"Oh, fortunately, I can establish the point at once, and by means that must tend wonderfully to the satisfaction of my Lord Walsingham," said Bazzini, starting up and approaching the window. "You shall see that I did not come unprepared with a witness."

Opening the casement, from which it seemed the fastenings had been withdrawn, the Italian gave a signal to some one without; and then, making his way through the shrubbery, where he had evidently been concealed, a heavy-looking, coarse-featured man, muffled up in a shabby white great coat, shambled into the room, and boldly took up his position against the mantelpiece.

"There," said Bazzini, indicating with a gesture his accomplice whom he had summoned as a witness, "there stands Tony Borelli, who holds the documents I mentioned, and who knows the whole story."

"To be sure I do," answered Borelli, drawing out from his pocket a greasy packet of papers; "here are proofs of the birth of Beatrice Bazzini, daughter of

Beatrice and Pietro Bazzini; and who was placed by my friend here in an asylum at Naples, and then taken away when she was eight years old, to be reclaimed by her proper parents. I was a witness to it all, and can swear to the truth of the same whenever called upon."

"You hear that," said the Italian, triumphantly; "Now shall we come to terms, or shall I and my honest comrade patiently wait the return of his lordship, and let him see what a valuable acquaintance he has made?"

"You are bent upon my ruin," sobbed Celestine, now completely overwhelmed with grief at the cruel fate that appeared in store for her; "I have no answer to make. You have me in your power, and I must submit to my destiny;" and clasping her hands before her face, she drooped her head upon the table, and wept bitterly in the abandonment of despair.

"Come," exclaimed Bazzini, "I have no intention of being harsh with you; for, as I have said to you before, though there is no love between us, you are still my own child; and I am not one of those who would kill the bird that gives us the golden egg. You see we want money, and we know that you have the best right to give it us. Get a thousand pounds for us out of your noble friend, and I promise you that we will trouble you no more."

"A thousand pounds!" repeated Celestine, raising her face, that, moistened with tears, exhibited an ashy paleness; "I have not that sum in my possession."

"Well, to-morrow night will do," continued Bazzini; "and if you will promise me it shall be ready, I will come at the same hour."

"I do promise—it shall be then obtained for you," gasped the timid girl, scarcely knowing what she said, but catching at the slightest hope that presented itself of being free from her persecutors, if it were only for a time. "To-morrow night, at the same hour, I will procure for you a thousand pounds."

"Right," growled forth Borelli, "you are well provided for here; and it will be but proper for you to give some assistance to your poor father, who has to work very hard to gain a decent living, I assure you."

"Remember," added the Italian, emphatically, "if we leave you now so contentedly, it is because we depend upon your promise, which, for your own sake, it will be as well to have strictly kept. I shall myself come to claim the amount."

"And you will then free me from this tyrannical persecution?" urged Celestine; "I shall obtain, by the payment of this sum, an immunity from all further visits, and need never apprehend any similar annoyance or extortion for the future?"

"Precisely so," returned Bazzini, with a significant glance at his comrade; "it is our intention to leave England as soon after as possible."

"Then I must be content to comply with your exorbitant demand," said Celestine, as she dreaded every moment the return of Walsingham, and was afraid of prolonging the interview. "I will give what you require on those conditions; but you must leave me instantly."

"Well, it wouldn't be as well for you if his lordship happened to find us here, certainly," cried Borelli; "for you see that we should be obliged to tell him what we came for, and that might lead, perhaps, to some rather unpleasant explanations."

"Do not delay your departure another moment," implored Celestine, who, glancing at the time-piece, saw with nervous impatience the minute hand was rapidly traversing the dial towards the completion of another circuit; "it is past midnight, and even now I fancy I can hear the wheels of Lord Walsingham's carriage."

"Let us have some wine first," demanded the Italian, "I know his lordship keeps an excellent cellar."

Celestine rapidly snatched a decanter that was on the sideboard, and hastily filled two glasses with the contents.

"That diamond necklace sparkles so brilliantly in the light, that I really could not think of leaving without it," observed Bazzini, as he tossed off the wine, and fixed his eyes on the coveted treasure.

"It was a gift, I cannot part with it," said Celestine, firmly, remembering that it was the first present Walsingham had made.

"Well, we are in no hurry," coolly rejoined the other, returning with a replenished glass to the sofa; "you can have time to consider whether it is to be given up or not."

"Take it and begone," yielded the terrified dansense, whose fears were now becoming more intense with the lapse of every minute.

"That brooch, those bracelets," further insisted the Italian, as, having pocketed the necklace, he noticed the value of the other ornaments she wore; "they will serve us instead of ready money in the meantime."

Celestine detached the trinkets from her dress, and relinquished them into the grasp of Bazzini, who had extended his hand for their reception.

"You have now all that I possess; leave me, I beseech you."

"Well, I don't know that there is any occasion for us to stop longer, Tony," spoke the Italian, addressing his comrade; "and if she keeps her promise to-morrow night, I shall be satisfied. So for the present, my girl," he added, with brusque effrontery, nodding a salutation as he refilled his glass for the third time, "I shall wish you good-night, and pleasant dreams for your companions."

"Good-night, mademoiselle," added Borelli, with a bluff acknowledgment, as he followed the example of his companion; and then accompanying the Italian, who had thrown open the window, they stepped out together upon the lawn, and disappeared in the darkness of the grounds beyond.

The moment they departed, Celestine, who had with difficulty sustained her presence of mind during the tortures of the scene that had just terminated, sank upon the couch the Italian had so recently quitted, and, with a tumultuous confusion of thoughts passing through her brain, she reviewed the appalling conspiracy of which she had been the victim.

The conviction she had of the deeply-seated prejudices of Lord Walsingham, so clearly set forth in the conversation that had taken place between them; the utter hopelessness of retaining his regard when he learned the ignominy of her origin; the fear of the Italian's vengeance when he found his demands were not complied with, and the impossibility of assigning a satisfactory reason for obtaining so large an amount from her lover, were successively the subjects of her reflection. Deeply did she brood over the evils by which she was threatened, and the more she reflected the more she was convinced that there was no other course left open to her but immediate flight from the new home to which her persecution had extended. Conscious that she had neither nerve nor fortitude

sufficient to encounter the exposure that would take place on the following night, if she still remained an occupant of the villa, Celestine resolved to plunge beneath the surface of society, and obtain an obscurity in its depths, which would elude even the persevering search of the man who had, by some unknown means, traced her to the mansion where she then resided.

Passionately as she loved Walsingham, ardently as she believed herself to be loved by him in return, she could not hazard the chances of a discovery so painfully embarrassing. She pictured to herself the mingled amazement and mistrust with which he would listen to the details of her early life—the aversion that he might feel towards her, engendered by the sight of the man whom she had been driven to consider her father, and she dared not stop to experience the change. The window through which Bazzini and his companion had passed was still open. It seemed to her to point out the means of escaping unobserved. The two female domestics, who were sitting up for Lord Walsingham in the wing of the building that was used as the servants' offices, would not notice her departure. The outer gate would be left unlocked till his return, and she began to look upon the accident that had caused his going, and the delay that had impeded the fulfilment of his promise, as being most fortunate circumstances in her favour.

Materials for writing were within her reach, and she hastily penned a brief note to account for her sudden and compelled absence. The note ran thus:—

"My dear Walsingham,

"An unfortunate combination of events will force me to resign, in this abrupt and most unexpected manner, the kind hospitality which you have so generously shown me. With the sentiments of my own heart unaltered, I am likewise forced to relinquish all claims upon your affection—a still more painful sacrifice. A mystery hangs over me, and governs my actions, which I cannot now explain—time alone may withdraw the veil. To-night you took a farewell that must be considered final. I am henceforth as one dead to the world. Forgive the hasty determination that a true appreciation of your honour and character has caused, and forget, in the attraction of a more deserving woman and a happier alliance, the unhappy being that has still the presumption to sign herself

"Your own devoted Celestine."

Hastily sealing the letter, she left it upon the table in such a manner that it could not fail to attract his notice immediately upon his entrance; and with no other preparation than her bonnet and shawl, hurriedly thrown on, Celestine stepped out upon the lawn, glided like a shadow across the pathway, and in another moment was beyond the outer gate.

Scarcely had she turned into the road than the whirring sound of carriage-wheels, and the distant tramp of horses' feet approaching nearer, made her aware of Lord Walsingham's vicinity. She stepped aside into the shade of a projecting porch, and she saw the vehicle drive up to the gate through which she had just emerged, and rattle through the avenue that led up to the villa. Without daring to pause in her flight, she quickened her pace onward, glad to have thus narrowly escaped his notice, and never relaxed her speed until she had gained the neighbouring residence of Madame Romani, to whose friendship she was indebted for an asylum for the night.

Great was the grief and astonishment of Walsingham when he found the letter that announced her departure, but the surprise thus created was soon after changed to a feeling of more harrowing intensity and a more perplexing nature, when, on passing to his suite of apartments above, he found a robbery had been committed on the premises, and that a quantity of plate and valuable jewellery had disappeared. Linking the ambiguous tenor of Celestine's own letter with the information she had communicated of such a project being in contemplation, and coupling the fact of her leaving with the earnest manner in which she had persuaded him to comply with the request conveyed in the letter, that he had subsequently found to be forged, he was irresistibly led to one afflicting, but unavoidable conclusion. Celestine was either herself the originator of the robbery, or had connived at its perpetration, and it was thus that he fancied the letter furnished a confirmation of his belief, as he misconstrued her equivocal meaning into an acknowledgment of her guilt.

To clear up a portion of the mystery that attended this daring exploit, we must now retrograde in our narrative to explain the causes that led to Bazzini and his companion acting thus unexpectedly in concert, and then bring up the chain of events to the time when they appeared at the villa.

After the murder of the Savoyard had taken place, the Italian accompanied Borelli to the door of the lodging-house down the court in Leather Lane. A mutual suspicion derived from the subtle watchfulness of Bazzini had led to their tracking the footsteps of Jacopo in the manner that has been narrated, and an investigation into the boy's conduct brought to light such evidence of the sly duplicity he had practised, that the revengeful disposition of the padrone had been only satisfied with the infliction of the most summary vengeance. Lest those to whom he was suspected of giving information relative to the movements of Borelli should anticipate the robbery that had been planned, it was arranged between them that the burglary should be undertaken the same night, and that the plunder they obtained should be shared together.

With this understanding they reached, about an hour afterwards, the grounds of Lord Walsingham's villa, and, favoured by the darkness of the night, they had no difficulty in climbing over the wall and dropping down quietly among the foliage of the shrubbery on the opposite side. To decoy the noble owner from the villa, should circumstances render it necessary, the Italian, assisted by the letters of the Earl of Winterton, that he had obtained from Jarvis, had prepared a dexterous imitation of that nobleman's handwriting; and to Borelli he gave the note that was delivered in the manner we have seen. How the bait was successful, and how the real indisposition of the earl realised the account that was fabricated by Bazzini, and caused his lordship's detention, are events that have been already described. As soon as they had watched Walsingham off, the Italian obtained a view of Celestine, who, to his delight and amazement, he found a resident in the building, and, determined to seize this additional advantage, he conferred with his associate, and they altered their original plan.

The alarm he purposely created by his slow and silent entrance produced the effect he had expected on the nervous temperament of the affrighted girl, and gave him the opportunity of abstracting all that was valuable or portable in the rooms. The rest of their proceedings—the triumphant manner in which they carried off their booty—the stipulation agreed upon by Celestine, and their final arrangement for the

following evening, arose from the successive advantages Bazzini found he was in a position to command.

They had no fear of Celestine alluding to the guests she had so strangely been compelled to entertain during the absence of her protector, and believing the blame of the robbery would fall upon the servants, or, at least, could not be proved against themselves—a conclusion equally satisfactory—the two ruffians departed to their haunt in town. In high spirits at the profitable result of their adventure, and with sanguine expectations of bringing their next attempt to a similarly successful issue, they spent the remainder of the night in feasting and drinking; and when morning dawned, it found them still lingering over their cups, and concerting fresh schemes of roguery for the day following.

How the project they contemplated came to be baffled in a complete and most unlooked-for manner, we shall shortly have occasion to show. At present, we must turn to other scenes and other characters.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE POLITICAL REFORMER.

Ten years before the date of our story, there was a jovial-hearted fellow, the landlord of a little road-side inn near the village of Bradley, whom it would have done your heart good to have known. His name was Jacob—or, as he was then more frequently called for the sake of brevity, "Jack"—Randall. If you had wanted to have impressed the inhabitants of another planet with an exalted notion of mundane humanity, Jack was the very man whom you would have been proud to have packed up in a small parcel, and sent as a specimen. You could have desired no better pattern of a thoroughly good-natured mortal, and in the manufacture of such would have gladly made any allowance by taking a quantity. He was not one of your uncertain fellows, with a temper like an April day, that varied with every moment, and was only sunny when there was no cloud to be seen; on the contrary, his fancy, like a porpoise, gambolled most in a storm; and the more dark and sombre it grew around him, the brighter flashed his lightning sparks of good humour.

"Ill luck to-day, better to-morrow," was his treasured maxim, and if the logical deduction was not always correct, he did his best to make it so, by having recourse to another axiom, that alleged, with indisputable accuracy, that when matters came to the worst, they were sure to mend. Jack, in fact, was an optimist of the first degree, and his happy enviable creed had been throughout his own life, and that of his father before him, the family belief that 'whatever happened' happened for the best.

At this time the great source and secret of Jack's happiness was his pipe, a quaint old-fashioned meerschaum, that was his constant companion on all occasions, and with which he would not have parted for the wealth of the Indies. The senior Randall, who had in his early days made sundry wild voyages to various parts of the habitable globe, had brought it many years before from some unknown region across the seas; and when the senior Randall departed upon his final journey from earth, the family talisman descended to Jack as his sole inheritance. Cocker himself would have been staggered at a computation of the many pounds of tobacco that had been successively consumed in its bowl, until its very surface had blushed into a sympathetic tawny red at the enormity it had committed; and as for the smoke it had evolved in instalments of puffing, there would have been amply enough in the aggregate to have occasioned a total eclipse of the sun for the next century. Whenever Jack was in doubt, difficulty, or distress, he flew to his old meerschaum for decision, extrication, and relief; whilst the oftener he was driven to have recourse to it, the fonder he became of his favourite, and the more tenderly and tenaciously was it cherished.

But if Jack was thus such an inveterate lover of the nicotian weed, it was not that he cared much for the mere ordinary brute indulgence of smoking; his whiffs were those of a philosopher, and he smoked psychologically. His pipe was to him the type of contentment, of sociality, of that interchange of good fellowship which he had endeavoured through life so assiduously to cultivate. It was with him the medium through which he thought, and the vaporous wreaths that issued from the bowl became thus the shadowy embodiment of so many distinct ideas. Nay, he had attained, by constant practice, to such a habit of mingling fumigation with meditation, that the amber mouth-piece became at last endowed with the attributes of an oracle, and he studied its responses with the interest of a Delphic devotee. Whilst those around him were tossed upon the billows of popular controversy, and were agitated by the questions that arose out of the constantly changing currents of events, Jack was as cool and placid as a frozen lake, and kept his principles as fixed and upright as a rock imbedded in its depths. He believed in Providence and smoked his pipe.

His father had been a pilot, and in that capacity had acquired some little emolument, and more honours. With the aid of a small legacy, and his own thrifty habits, he had contrived to spend the close of his days in his native place, a small village on the Cheshire coast, where his chief delight consisted in smoking the old meerschaum in his cosy ingle-nook, and narrating stories of the sea to his son, until at last he sank contentedly into his grave, and left Jack Randall in undisputed possession of a snug cottage and the old meerschaum, previously referred to, as the principal bequest. Randall, however, was not an idle consumer of the earth's produce, without yielding to the earth something in return, and in all the pride of honest handicraft worked hard for his living. Not that he had any especial employment cut out for him, but being a kind of universal adept, willing and able to take any thing that offered, he was rarely without the means of turning his industry and ingenuity to a profitable account.

Love is generally the first turnpike through which youth has to pass and pay toll on the road to manhood, and if Randall had never fallen in love before he came of age, it was neither for want of temptation nor opportunity, as the prettiest lasses in the village had plentifully provided him with both. Many were the insinuating hints thrown out to him that his attention in certain quarters would be far from being considered disagreeable; but, in a discussion of the matter over his pipe, Jack had invariably found such good and efficient reasons for not availing himself of these privileges, that he had been popularly set down as a hopeless bachelor, when his heart was attacked and captured at a time when he was least prepared to offer resistance.

This conquest was effected by a little laughing

brunette, whose disposition was the very counterpart of Jack's, and whose blythe and generous heart was a mirror that reflected the best and kindliest emotions of humanity; and there was also a neat roadside inn near the summit of the hill which led down to the village, and it was the landlord of this rustic hostel who had the honour of being her father.

As courtship, however interesting to the principal parties concerned, is, after all, but a very trite story in description, we shall only say, that, after many months of preparatory visits to the "Roebuck," and much preliminary argument with his pipe, Jack Randall ventured upon matrimony, and, finally, by the retirement of his father-in-law, succeeded to the position of host, together with the possession of all goods and appurtenances belonging to the comfortable inn that throve under the sign of the "Roebuck."

For some years Randall went on smoothly enough. It was in the old coaching days, and as his tavern came in for a fair share of the traffic of the high road on which it was situated, he got a reasonable amount of profit out of the business. He was no more exempt than his neighbours from the cares and calamities of life, but his good spirits enabled him to pass them over lightly, and to those of a deeper nature he was philosophically resigned. His wife died after many years of mutual happiness had blessed their union, but she left behind a fair girl, an only child, in whose resemblance of features and kindred sweetness of disposition her memory was perpetuated.

At last a change came over the peaceful tenor of his life. For nearly a twelvemonth before, there had been some rumours of a railway coming close upon the village, if even it did not actually run quite through it; and some even went so far as to state that a station had been decided upon close by. This, however, was deemed such an unlikely occurrence, that the peace of the locality was but little disturbed by the intelligence; and even when the county paper had made some remarks upon the nature of the act for its formation, as it received parliamentary sanction, and when a farmer on his way to the next market town had further encountered a surveyor and his assistants, with theodolite and level, even then, so strong were the old prejudices, that a general feeling of infidelity was abroad upon the subject.

The old coachmen shook their heads when their opinion was asked for, and protested it would never come to any thing; the village prophets predicted, if it did, the country would be ruined immediately after; and repeatedly as the subject was discussed among the gossips of the place, no one was found bold enough to welcome the innovation and yield a faith to the promises held out.

Soon after this, the preparations made to set about the work in earnest put the matter beyond the possibility of further dispute.

One morning the villagers got up and found navigators, who had risen before them, busily employed plying pickaxe and spade, and making a tunnel under the very hill where the Roebuck suspended its sign, to invite the wearied traveller to rest and refreshment. Huge mounds of earth began to rise along the meadows, and clumsy carts, laden with formidable pyramids of chalk and flint, were seen passing to and fro all day long, cutting deep ruts into the soft daisied sward, and piling up the sides of an embankment, as far as the eye could reach. "Navvies," too, commenced a series of bibulous invasions upon Randall's stock of fermented beverages; and the startled villagers would cluster curiously round the porch of a summer's evening, to see the laying down of those continuous rails, which seemed to link them as with a chain of iron to the great metropolis far away.

From that time confidence in the old coachmen was gone for ever, and when the first train came rattling down with its fiery steeds in front, and its long vaporous trail of curling steam behind, whisking along the embankment, and under the hill, and again out of sight, before one had time to look round, people began to view the innovation as a matter of course, and returned to their homes just as if nothing had happened.

So far the "Roebuck" had derived some pecuniary advantage from the change, but its landlord would gladly have surrendered all the prospective increase of profits for a return to the quiet undisturbed days of yore. Strange faces began to appear in the parlour, and the old customers gradually fell off. The familiar portrait of "Sir John Barleycorn" over the chimney-piece was supplanted by a railway time-table; the coloured prints of the four seasons that decorated each compartment of the room were thrust aside to make way for sketches of tunnels and viaducts; and travelling caps and railway comforters hung about the row of hat-pegs behind the door, and completely superseded the accustomed broad-brimmed hats and long-skirted coats of the farmers that the eye had been taught to expect in that direction.

Among the visitors to the parlour recently installed in the old walnut-tree chairs, where the first frequenters had nightly taken their seats by long established prescription, there had been one brought down by the railway who soon made himself conspicuous among the rest by his stentorian capacity of lungs and the violent tone of his political opinions. He was a short, thickset man, with a sharp, shrewd countenance, and a mass of long, black, wiry hair on his head, that gave him, when excited, a peculiar aspect of ferocity. When present he would hear nobody speak but himself; and as his harangues were for the most part redolent of any thing but the principles of universal harmony, Randall had to keep his pipe alight the whole time in order to hear with patience his terrible denunciations of all who were happier or richer than himself. What especial enactments Mr. Gruffey would have made for the world at large, had circumstances conspired to place him at the head of the government, it was not easy to conjecture; but as he frequently delighted to observe he was not a "half and-half" man, but a right down physical-force advocate to the last stick, and no mistake about it, it may be presumed that he entertained peculiarly philanthropic notions calculated for the benefit of the entire community.

"Yes, sir," exclaimed the agitator energetically one evening as he and Randall were left alone to finish the discussion by themselves, "there is nothing like physical force to carry the point you want," and he thumped the table violently to illustrate his assertion, "nothing like guns and pikes to make your opinions understood. Every man should be his own soldier; every man should be his own policeman; every man should be his own House of Commons What's the use of a government? What do we want with authority? All sheer humbug. Bah!"

Randall mildly ventured to observe, that though abuses had crept into various institutions, yet that such formed no proof the institutions themselves were utterly worthless.

"Pooh, pooh!" returned Mr. Gruffey, "you are a miserable serf, a wretched, ill-used, trampled-on,

ground-down Englishman, without any of the rights that you ought to have, and I shall never rest content until you know it and feel it. The whole state of society is wrong, sir, radically wrong; there is no such thing as liberty in the present state of the law; and what I contend for is, that every free-born Briton has a full and perfect right to do what he likes. The tongue is all very well for a woman, but if a man wants to carry his point, he must not only be able to open his mouth, but he must show his teeth as well;" and saying this, Mr. Gruffey slapped his hat firmly on his head with the air of one who had done the human state some service, and disappeared through the doorway to stir others up into the same way of thinking.

Night after night did the agitator strive to make the unfortunate landlord a convert to his own view of the matter; and in order to have a better opportunity of illustrating his doctrines of universal brotherhood, he went so far as to give the "Roebuck" the benefit of his exclusive patronage, and took up his quarters there as freely, and with as little regard for the bill, as if he considered the establishment as his own property

From having the necessity of these desperate resources continually impressed upon him, Randall began at last to really consider himself as one suffering under grievous wrongs. He smoked his pipe less than formerly, and walked about with a troubled and discontented spirit, that formed a striking contrast to his former satisfied and joyous demeanour. He began to take less interest in his own affairs, and more in those of other people; and it was not many weeks before the change attracted the attention of the neighbours and the road-side inn exhibited all the symptoms of neglect. From that time Randall was an altered man. He got involved in parish disputes, took the chair at political meetings for objects which nobody clearly understood, his household affairs got more and more deranged, and at last his creditors stepped in, took all, and the next day a board was hung under the sign-post, intimating that the house was "to be let or sold."

Gruffey, who traded on his patriotism as a pedlar on his merchandise, and who supported these violent measures not because he believed in them, but because he found them most profitable, of course did not in-

sult the ruined landlord by any mention of the filthy lucre which he promised to pay, but gave proofs that he despised it. He shifted his quarters to another locality, and thus disseminating, in the true spirit of freedom, the doctrines of the society from which he was sent as a salaried delegate, he not only gave additional force to his precepts, but illustrated them by making himself the principal example. He went about, he said, with the disinterested object of promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and he pleasantly and successfully carried out his philanthropic intentions by making the greatest number "number one."

For some weeks Randall hung about the village; his manners changed to those of an idle vagabond, and his disposition altered to that of a reckless profligate. He set himself up for a persecuted and injured man, whose prosperity it was the object of all his fellow creatures to crush. The violent opinions propagated by Gruffey, and the laxity of social principles he had so strenuously laboured to infuse into the mind of Randall, had not been without effect. He sent off his daughter to assist in the shop of a friend of his in the east of London, and departed himself for a neighbouring town to engage in any employment that promised the means of subsistence. Here he found many pursuing the same course that Gruffey had been upholding in the country. Some few sincere in their convictions, and acting from integrity of purpose; others with perverted talents, exercising them with the object of converting the services of misguided men to their own advantage; but the majority of them careless of what they did, and, suffering from a position chiefly caused by their own errors, only anxious for what personal profit they could get out of a general scramble with society. Into an association of this kind, and the one of which Gruffey had been the most eloquent and unscrupulous missionary, Randall entered with enthusiasm. For awhile the novelty and excitement of the scene engrossed his attention, but as these wore off he had recourse to a more violent stimulus, and took to dram-drinking.

He made the lowest tap-rooms his constant haunts, and became a pot-house orator. What was at first an occasional spur to his brain, next fastened itself upon him as a habit, and, finally, as a necessity. He lost every situation that he procured, through the consequences of his dissipation, and at last was content to sponge upon the few who had either the means or inclination to gratify his propensity.

One night when the rain was pouring down in a stedfast torrent, and the drenched streets were only animated by the rattling progress of a coach or cab, Randall, miserably clad and half-stupefied with the potations he had imbibed, turned into the parlour of a low public-house he was accustomed to frequent, and there slunk into a corner by the fire to wait for the clearing up of the weather.

There was no other inmate when he entered, for it was late, and the regular customers had left; but remaining, as if by accident, on the mantelpiece was a pipe, which upon a closer view he discovered to be his own old meerschaum, and which had been seized with the rest of his goods at the sale.

He could not refrain from renewing his former acquaintance with it, and collecting the remains of the tobacco left about the tables, he filled the bowl, and, drawing his chair nearer the fire, he began to smoke.

With the revival of his old habit, the recollection of many things past, and till now forgotten, vividly returned, and he fell into a dreamy retrospection of his bygone life. The candle had waned in size, and grown long in the wick, but the vaporous cloud that served as a disc to the dissolving views of his imagination had only just dispersed as he fancied he heard a voice, soft and subdued, calling upon him by name. He knocked the ashes out of the bowl, listened, and then, apparently acquiring a more sonorous tone by practice, the voice proceeded. He bent his head to listen, and his suspicions were confirmed — it emanated from the old meerschaum.

"Jacob"—it might have been the mouth-piece that spoke—"you have had a slight intimation given to you of what befals those who neglect their own business to run after that of other people. Heaven knows that there are enough evils in this world to be redressed without adding to them others of our own creation. Go on getting reform for every thing that wants it, and it will be long before you need give up for want of employment, but do it with a firm determination to use no violence. An earthquake upsets a city altogether; it is your quiet practical builders, and men of good taste and calm judgment, that improve it. People don't like to be bullied into submission; but convince them with plain sensible reasoning, and they are sure to yield in the end. Physical force, Jacob, is after all only a coward's argument, and carries no permanent value or respect with it. The press is a far more formidable weapon than the pikestaff, and in the cause of right will more promptly gain the redress sought. You, and others who have worked like you, have an honest right to rank among the highest, but society is not a see-saw, where you must see one end fall before the opposite extremity can rise. Legislature is like a fire; every body thinks he can poke it the best; but those who are always setting you on to make a blaze only want you to burn your own fingers that you may save theirs. Above all, Jacob, don't abuse the newspaper; it is the poor man's best friend, and has done more service to the good cause than all the pikes, and bullets, and blustering threats in the world. Have as much reform as you like—you cannot strive too much in the right path; but talk about accomplishing great measures by violent means, and you throw away the last chance you have of obtaining them."

The old meerschaum dropped from his hands, Randall started from his reverie, and a traveller who was stopping at the inn for the night entered the room to reclaim the pipe he had left forgetfully behind him.

It so happened that the visitor was a kind-hearted, liberal man, who had been a general dealer in the village of Bradley, as well as one of the early customers to the "Roebuck," in memory of which he had bought on the day of the sale the old meerschaum, as a token of the jovial hours he had passed within the sphere of its fumiferous outpourings. The recognition that ensued, brought about through the agency of this nicotian tube, was followed by a hearty greeting; and a frank disclosure by Randall of his altered circumstances led to the other making a generous offer to assist him in an effort to better his condition. The quiet hour of meditation enjoyed by the contemplative smoker had not passed away without leaving a beneficial effect behind. Randall resolved upon instantly abandoning his idle associates, returning to a course of life that should be marked by the characteristics of what might truly be called his better days; and gratefully accepting the proposition of his old acquaintance, he thenceforward promised to adhere to

the work that he might get, without meddling with the dangerous doctrines that he had been deluded by in his first attempt to become a political reformer.

With the loan thus obtained, and which by the way he shortly after paid honestly back to the lender, Jacob Randall came to London and turned bird-fancier—a pursuit for which his taste and inclinations in early life had better qualified him than for any other. His daughter, now grown up almost to womanhood, was an excellent housekeeper; his shop was well attended to, and for a time he strove and made his humble dwelling a happy home for both. But the unfortunate propensity for drink in which he had once indulged at last came back with greater force than ever, and then returned those evil passions that had slumbered during the interval of sober industry, and lured him again to seek the company of the idle and the dissolute.

The small profits of the business he looked upon as insufficient, and he tried to raise various supplies through other sources; from which, as he was by no means scrupulous, he was not deterred by a consciousness of their illegality. Thus he had for some time worked a private still down in the vaults under Waterloo Road, in conjunction with the most desperate members of the fraternity that he had become leagued with; and it was only when a sudden discovery of the practices there carried on caused two of his companions to be convicted, that he gave up the hazardous employment. Then he ventured upon a little private smuggling on his own account, and his visits to the various ships as they came into port enabled him, under the pretence of purchasing foreign birds, to drive a profitable traffic with the sailors in contraband spirits and tobacco. And thus the business he was supposed to rely upon fell away and was neglected.

All this had taken place without Mary having more than a suspicion of the nefarious pursuits in which her father was engaged. She knew that his nature had entirely changed, that he drank deeply, and that his manners, under the influence of the potations in which he so copiously indulged, were day by day becoming more brutalised; but it was not until she had overheard the compact he had entered into with the miser Hawkins, that she was fully aware of the extent to which he had become depraved. Her entreaties having been unavailing, and her attempt to reclaim him from his vicious courses having been savagely repulsed, she then saw that her only hope was in withdrawing herself from the contamination that surrounded the dwelling; and how, with a determination to escape, she had carried out that intention, the reader already knows.

Randall, after his daughter's departure, plunged still deeper into the vortex of dissipation. So long as the funds lasted which he had got from the miser's hoard, he went on drinking; from the first hour of the morning till the last at night he poured the fiery draught down his throat to deaden the reproaches of his conscience and annihilate the terrors of reflection. At this time he met Gruffey, the man who had driven him from his home, and who had now, like himself, become an outcast. The credulous disciples, on whose subscriptions he had long continued to subsist, had either grown too poor or too well-informed to suffer the delusion to be continued longer with profit, and he was then looking out for fresh dupes and trying to organise a new fund. His meeting with Randall resulted in a revival of their former intimacy, and acting under the persuasion of Gruffey, the quondam bird-fancier consented to assist in a conspiracy that was being formed under the direction of the artful demagogue, and to the furtherance of this scheme the last coin he had was devoted.

The inflammatory speeches of Gruffey, or "the Firebrand," as he was occasionally designated, had not been suffered to escape the notice of the authorities, and the mischievous tendency of the revolutionary principles he inculcated, and their effect upon the minds of the ignorant and the foolish, had been carefully estimated and considered. At every meeting he attended there were spies who secretly watched his movements, and every word he uttered was recorded in the note-book of a reporter who had been specially retained for the purpose. Randall was also marked out as one of the disaffected, and to him this system of espionage was likewise extended. But the information required was easily obtained through other channels. Even among the ringleaders of the party there was not wanting one who was ready for a bribe to turn traitor on his companions, and it was only the very insignificance of the plot and the unimportance attached to those concerned in it that prevented its immediate suppression. Thus matters were allowed to proceed unimpeded, though not unnoticed, till the period arrived when some more turbulent demonstration than usual attracted the attention of government, and rendered necessary the adoption of more stringent measures for the protection of the public and the preservation of property.

At a late hour one night, Randall was returning alone from a meeting where Gruffey had got himself elected treasurer. The crafty demagogue had been working more successfully than he had yet been able to do upon the minds of his auditory, and the result of his eloquent appeal to their pockets had been a considerable collection of pence, which, in his new capacity, he was to take care of and appropriate to the objects of the society for which the subscription was raised. The refusal of Gruffey to account for similar funds exacted in the same manner had made Randall long before suspicious of his integrity, and this last manœuvre, the object of which he well knew, had so convinced him of the treacherous part he was playing, that he had left the false democrat in disgust, and had resolved henceforward to withdraw himself from the connection.

Passing on through the street, musing over the events of his past life, and wishing that some chance of redeeming his lost character was open to him, he began to reflect on the happiness he had once enjoyed, and the contrast it afforded to the miserable condition of an outcast that now threatened the remainder of his days. Drink and bad company had been his ruin, and had warped his better principles; but there was still enough left of his original nature to make him capable of feeling bitterly the errors of which he had been guilty. He had thought little of the kind disposition and patient endurance of his daughter whilst she was with him; but now that he was alone, and the soothing influence of her voice was absent from his ear, Randall not only earnestly deplored the cause that had driven her from his home, but he felt that had she been then near him he would have gladly relinquished all for the sake of her, and that his reformation would have been as permanent as he meant it to be sincere. He had scarcely missed her at first; whilst drowning his cares in liquor, he had passed the time succeeding her departure in a reckless whirl of intoxication; but now the whole of his money had gone, and, in his moments of sober reflection, he looked back upon the past; deeply did he repent of

the harsh treatment she had received from him, and yearn to ask for her forgiveness.

In one of these regretful moods, now rendered more poignant by the impoverished state of his finances, he was stopping opposite the door of a gin-palace, hesitating as to whether he should enter and purchase a temporary forgetfulness of his condition, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and turning round, he saw a gentlemanly-dressed man was at his side, whose features he remembered to have noticed at the meeting turned frequently towards him.

"Your name is Randall?" said the stranger, drawing him quietly out of the stream of passengers into the doorway of an adjoining house; "you were formerly the keeper of an inn at Bradley?"

"Before I answer your inquiry," returned Jacob, with suspicion, "let me know the object for which it is made."

"My question hardly needs a reply," pursued the speaker. "I recognised you at once; and your voice has made me certain I am right. You have done wisely in withdrawing from the company of the unprincipled man that seeks to cheat the poor creatures he has this night been deluding with his treacherous promises. Had you stayed longer, I should have myself given you a caution to retire; but you anticipated me."

"Wherefore, then, do you now address yourself to me?"

"Because I believe you to be still willing to adopt a better course of life than that you have been lately leading, if the opportunity were given you. Am I right, or not?"

"Prove me by giving the chance," answered Randall, wondering in what way he had enlisted the interest of a complete stranger; "and if you are as sincere in making the offer as I am in my wish to get an honest livelihood, you shall not find the matter long doubtful."

"You must first convince me that your reformation is complete," continued the speaker; "and should I find it so, you shall have no one but yourself to blame, if you do not fully retrieve your character under more prosperous circumstances. What are those wishes that you desire most to see fulfilled?"

"My first wish," replied Randall, "is to see my daughter, who has fled from me; whither, I know not; but it was I who drove her from her home. Now," he added, in a sorrowful voice, "though she would find me an altered man, I fear my regrets are vain. My other wish is only that which I before expressed,—a fair field for my labours; I desire no more than the subsistence which they may procure."

"Perhaps the realisation of both will not be found so far distant as you imagine," returned the stranger; "but we shall have time hereafter to speak of that. Take this card; it is the address of a wine-merchant in the city, who will give you immediate employment when you present it to him. He will know from whom it comes, and place sufficient reliance on the recommendation to need no other. In one month—or, perhaps, sooner—you will hear from me again; in the meantime be attentive to your duties, shun the baleful temptations that have been your curse, and you may live to find that all hope of happiness is not yet extinct."

As he spoke, the stranger delivered to him a pencilled direction; and when Randall, after glancing at it by the gaslight, turned round to thank the giver, he was gone.

The next day Jacob Randall tested the value of the promise he had received so unexpectedly, and to his surprise, as well as gratification, he found the effect of that presentation had not been overrated. Installed in his new employment, the moment he appeared, it was evident to him that his unknown patron had long before watched his movements, and taken an interest in his welfare, and as he entered with willing assiduity on the occupation provided for him, he determined to prove that he was not unworthy the kindness that had been shown, nor undeserving the future favours that were held out to him as his prospective reward.

CHAPTER XXX.

REVENGE AND RETRIBUTION.

EARLY on the morning succeeding the robbery at the villa, the Italian called upon Jarvis, and mindful of the diabolical intention he had promised to carry out against the cause of the agent's disgrace and expulsion, he was received by him with welcome eagerness. The keen eyes of Jarvis sparkled with exulting satisfaction as he hurriedly beckoned his visitor into a more private room than that to which he was first introduced, and no sooner had the door been closed than he drew his chair close up to that of the Italian, and anxiously inquired whether he was ready to execute the design that had been agreed upon between them at their first interview.

"Here is that which would destroy twenty lives," muttered Bazzini, as he drew out of his vest a small phial filled with a fluid almost colourless, "and a few drops of this would speedily give you the power of setting your enemy at defiance. It has as little taste as colour, and he who has once received its deadly poison into the system will find his blood gradually dry up, whilst a burning fire rages through his veins, and makes even death itself a welcome refuge from the torture of its pangs."

"Excellent invention!" cried Jarvis, looking with ferocious joy on the instrument of his vengeance; "I long to hear of his writhing under its scorching influence. But tell me," he continued, "have you secured those details of my former life that I had heard the earl received from him?"

"They are here," rejoined Bazzini, handing over to him the papers he had purloined from the earl's library; "and trouble enough I had to get them. The door which you told me led from the back of the garden into the mansion was secured, and I had to clamber over the balcony. However, I managed to bring away the right article at last, and now I hope you are satisfied."

"Yes, it can only have been from Mordaunt that he could have learned all this," said Jarvis, in a kind of half-soliloquy, as he dwelt upon the document with which he had been furnished; "every line that reveals the history of my connection with the bank proves that he could have obtained it through no other channel. It is like his handwriting too," he muttered, as his eye glanced closer to the page, "but that must be but another trick of my distempered fancy."

"And who is this Mordaunt, that you seem to have had such a horror of meeting his counterpart?" asked Bazzini, bending forward as he put the question; "from what I have there gathered," he observed, referring to the papers, "you appear to have been playing some curious pranks in your time."

"Ha! you have read these, then?" interrupted Jarvis, looking up to his companion with a scowling

glance, and crumpling up the leaves into his desk with a visible show of vexation.

"Read them!" echoed the other, with a sneering laugh. "Do you think I could forbear being curious in such a matter more than other people? A pretty piece of biography it is, and must have enlightened the earl a good deal. I should never have disturbed him till he had devoured every word of it, and found out what a rascal he had got about him; only that, as ill luck would have it, he caught a glimpse of my ugly head, and that frightened him, so I was glad to be off before he called for assistance."

"Well, you never will betray me?" spoke the agent, warily, as with an assumption of confidence he sought to show a feeling of friendly reliance on the fidelity and discretion of his accomplice. "I need not be afraid of you—you to whom I have already been so liberal, and who will yet have more to claim from me?"

"That depends upon what you may do yourself hereafter," was the rejoinder, given in a consciously triumphant tone, whilst every word made Jarvis wince as they reached his ear; "I always like to make myself secure, and by holding others in subjection, I can prevent their turning round upon me. Now such a thing might at one time or other occur to you, and therefore it was that I armed myself with a knowledge of these circumstances in readiness."

Jarvis felt that he had somewhat overreached himself; but to remove from the mind of Bazzini an idea that he had any impression of the kind, he renewed his assurances of friendship, at the same time that he inwardly regretted he had been compelled to employ so dangerous a man as an assistant.

"Well, if we know that we can trust each other, I am content; but what has become of that Mordaunt that I spoke of just now?" reminded the Italian.

"He was drowned off Newfoundland in a ship which was bearing him away from the consequences of an extensive forgery he had committed," replied Jarvis; "and one that I had so planned as to throw the whole suspicion upon him."

"And in which you seemed to have borne the principal part, and obtained the greatest share of the profits," remarked Bazzini; "but you treated him rather unfairly in this matter, I suspect."

"I hated him!" exclaimed the agent, warming under the recollection of his animosity. "We were clerks together in the same bank, and he was always being pointed out to me as a pattern of integrity and honour, and an example that I should profit by and follow. The reiteration of these praises first caused my aversion, and then I resolved to be his ruin. He was of a frank and unsuspicious nature, and by subtle persuasion I contrived to wean him slowly but surely from what he called his strict and rigid notions of duty. I lured him on first to drink, then to play; and the money he lost by gambling made him come to me for funds. I lent him cash for further trials, then pressed him for repayment, and threatened him with exposure should he refuse. To satisfy my demand he had recourse—as I knew he must have—to the chances of play again, and then he lost still more. I whispered to him that a small portion out of the large amounts that daily passed through his hands would not be missed, and pointed out how easily it could be replaced. The bait took. He became involved still deeper, readily consented to assist me in a scheme for issuing fraudulent cheques that his defalcations might not be known, and then he fled in terror from the consequences, and my triumph was complete."

"And you had the satisfaction of making your revenge a source of profit too, it seems," observed the Italian; "but what followed?—for this is an affair after my own heart."

"He thwarted and crossed me in every thing," pursued Jarvis, without heeding the remark of his auditor, as if he went on speaking more for the relief of his own feelings than for the information of his companion: "even in love we were rivals together; and he, as usual, bore away the prize. When I had got rid of him, I renewed my old attachment to his wife, but she rejected me, and I vowed to have as sure a vengeance upon her. In return for the contemptuous repulse that I met with, she was beggared through my means, and died soon after, broken-hearted, with her children scattered helpless orphans on the world It was a glorious recompense for all the taunts and sneers I had endured through him."

"And then you wound yourself into the confidence of the earl?" continued the Italian, inquiringly.

"I had done so before then," rejoined the other; "and having once made myself useful to him, he did not dare to discard me; for I had so contrived to take advantage of the position I held, that he was kept in ignorance of the real revenue of the estate that was placed under my management. In another year I should have been myself its owner, had not that confounded meddling baronet, whose likeness to the fellow Mordaunt only increases the hate I bear him, stepped in and exposed me just as I was congratulating myself on the success of the entire transaction."

"You have not yet lost every chance of re-instating yourself in the good graces of the earl," added Bazzini, in a significant manner, "if you choose to abide by the proposition I am about to make to you."

"Ha! tell me how can this be done?" cried Jarvis, brightening under the influence of the hope that dawned within him; "for unless those letters be sent to Lord Walsingham, and which I took so much trouble to obtain, can help me in the matter, I know of no other means."

"It is by the possession of that information that I see the prospect not only of strengthening yourself in your former capacity, but even of assuming additional authority over the earl, and compelling him to submit to any terms you may choose to dictate."

"Such was my own belief and intention, when I procured them through the artifice you discovered," said Jarvis; "but my ambition took no higher reach than the hope of holding a threat over the earl, should he discover the sums I had received upon his account, and dispute my right to retain them."

"Listen," said Bazzini. "In those letters we have the admission, in the earl's own handwriting, that the estate he now holds was obtained by a concealment of the rights due to another, and we can act upon this disclosure."

"I must first tell you that the position of the earl is rather singular," interrupted the agent; "and if you intend acting upon this determination—for I see the aim you have in view—it is necessary that you should be made acquainted with the full particulars."

"Are you acquainted, then, with more than is here mentioned?" asked the Italian.

"It was chance that proved my friend," resumed Jarvis; "and, unknown to the Earl of Winterton, I found during my researches at Bradley Hall some private memoranda, in the late earl's handwriting, that put me upon the right track, and first incited me to examine closely the correspondence which the earl had with Lord Walsingham."

"And that you have, of course, carefully preserved?"

"It is securely kept," added the agent, "and will one day, I trust, make it worth while for the earl to pay handsomely for its production. But without tiring you with a prolix explanation of the family history to which it refers, I may tell you sufficient to govern the proceedings which we should mutually take, for I will not deny that your assistance will be essential to procure the full advantages of the plan, and which therefore may be undertaken between us."

"Proceed," responded Bazzini; "I am curious to learn the real state of the case."

"Briefly, then," rejoined Jarvis, "from these old memoranda and other sources I found the present Earl of Winterton and his brother were at variance throughout the greater part of their lives; and I knew that this enmity extended even to the earl's nephew, who, on the death of his father, was educated at his uncle's cost, but carefully kept in ignorance of his real birth."

"Which has not yet been made known to him, I believe," remarked Bazzini; "at least I presume so from the tenor of the earl's communication."

"You are right," was the reply; "and one of the principal objects that I have had in contemplation was to trace out his residence, and inform him of the good fortune that was in store. But my project was not then fully matured, and since the rupture with the earl has taken place I have lost all clue to his discovery."

"And it is for the purpose of finding him out, so that you can drive an advantageous bargain with him, that you think my aid might be found useful?"

Jarvis nodded and went on. "At present he knows the earl only as a patron or guardian; and for some trifling indiscretion of youth the annuity which was allowed him after leaving the university was suspended, thus leaving him dependent on his own ingenuity for a living—gained, I have some reason to believe, in no very creditable manner since that allowance was withdrawn."

"And by what name does he pass?" inquired Bazzini.

"Greene was the appellation under which the earl always wrote to him, and I have no doubt that as it was his mother's maiden name, it is the one by which he is still known."

"Greene!" mused Bazzini; "I have heard the name. His description?"

"He is now about thirty; tall, of dark complexion, and dark hair, and of good exterior."

"I am certain, then, that I know him, and I will undertake to bring you to him at a moment's notice."

"The better for our immediate benefit," answered Jarvis, "for we can put ourselves in communication with him at once. But I have not yet told you all. The earl's brother should have inherited the estate as being the eldest; but as the late earl was weak enough to yield to the wishes of his countess, Arthur was not only brought up as the favourite, but, as they were born within eleven months of each other, and the difference in their ages was not perceptible, he was brought up to take the precedence of his brother, who was thus robbed of his birthright."

"And how came you to acquire the knowledge of a fact that, for the sake of all parties, must have been so carefully concealed?" interrogated Bazzini.

"I tell you that accident proved my best friend," was the reply of Jarvis, as he brought his cunning eyes to bear fully upon the face of his companion. "There was an old library at Bradley, which had long been closed, and where the late earl had frequently passed his leisure hours. One day examining the premises when they had been opened, I found a secret cabinet, ingeniously constructed in the wainscot, and which the earl had made use of as a repository for his private papers. I have no doubt that the unsettled state of his mind—for he was said to have been insane some time before he died—had obliterated it from his recollection. It was among these that I found the entries of the births I spoke of, and foreseeing the power I should have, when any unforeseen event took place that might render it advisable for me to exercise it, I silently took possession of the record, and it has remained in my custody ever since."

"But why have you waited till now before you acted upon a discovery of so much consequence?"

"I was well enough content with the profits that were rising out of my connection with the earl, and I did not care to throw away the substance for the shadow. It was time to bring this forward when I felt my position required strengthening, and now that time has arrived. Lord Walsingham, from his intimacy with the brother of the present earl, had long had, it appears, some suspicion of what I have told you, and it was therefore necessary to make him a confidant of the secret, as soon as an alliance between the families was contemplated. Those letters in which the admission was made I could only obtain by the stratagem that you are aware of; and now I have acquainted you with the means that are at our disposal for dispossessing the earl of his claims, what was the plan you thought of for establishing mine?"

"You have already alluded to it," said Bazzini, "for indeed there is but one way open to us. We must find out the earl's nephew, and make the best bargain we can with him, on the condition that we help him by these papers to the title and estate."

"Precisely so; and you now see the imperative necessity that exists for the immediate removal of this Barrington from my path. It would be useless to think of getting a fortune out of one man, when the next moment another could scatter it with a breath."

"And you are determined then upon his death?"

"It is my only hope of safety; whilst he lives I am at his mercy, and so deadly is the vengeance I would have inflicted upon him, that he should writhe in agonies of torture, and suffer the most excruciating torment in his progress to the grave that human ingenuity is capable of inflicting. You do not fear your power of doing this, or hesitate at its accomplishment?"

"Not I," answered the Italian, unshrinkingly; "it is my trade, and I take a pride in it. There is too little of what is called humanity about me to make me have a scruple in such matters, and I have lived too long at war with all the world to mind what hellish deed I do, provided I get paid for it: so, as I suspect you care not how soon the business is dispatched, I shall set about my errand at once."

"And you have resolved upon the way in which it is to be administered?"

"Fear not for that," rejoined the miscreant; "it will be no difficult task. A few drops will suffice to produce the effect we require, and I shall easily find the way to employ them."

"And you will return or send to me when the deed is accomplished," said Jarvis, now opening the door for the Italian to depart.

"You shall hear from me directly," was the reply. "Other business will require my presence elsewhere; but my messenger will be a faithful one, and you can

send back word by him at what time I shall see you to-morrow concerning the earl."

"I shall be anxiously expecting his arrival," responded Jarvis; and with a rapid interchange of words that bore reference to the minor details of the murderous deed that was contemplated, the two parted from each other on the stairs, and as the agent returned to his room to calculate on the future safety he expected to enjoy, and triumph in the effectual measures he had taken to secure it, the Italian went off at a rapid rate towards the residence of the baronet.

"This day is likely to prove a profitable, as well as a busy one," soliloquised Bazzini, as he quickened his progress through the streets; "my meeting with Jarvis ought to put a few thousands into my pocket before the agent is out of my clutches, and to-night I have a certain prize awaiting me at the villa. Then, when the gold is mine, I can away to the continent and laugh at the fools and knaves that have enriched me here."

The house at which he finally stopped, obedient to the direction he had received, was a fine old mansion in Manchester Square; one of those substantial erections that are still to be met with in the more antiquated portions of the West End, and that have the stamp of the last century indelibibly impressed upon them. There was nothing there of modern ornament to stare down the durable formalities of old-fashioned architecture, but a reputable aspect of gloomy gentility was settled alike on all. As the eye caught a vestige of bygone days in the conical extinguishers on the railings, and the recollection of the old flambeaux was restored with the accompanying adjuncts of link-boys and sedans, one might almost picture the old nobility in the court costume of the first and second Georges, dozing away their hundred years of somniferous captivity in those quiet, sleepy-looking edifices, and doomed some day to wake up, sword, bag-wig, ruffles, and all, and take a wondering survey of this modern metropolis, with its perplexing growth of buildings and puzzling magnitude of improvements.

As Bazzini rang the bell, an attendant, of a swarthy eastern complexion, and who was not distinguished by the usual livery, appeared in answer to his summons, and ushered him into the hall. Having intimated his desire to speak to the baronet on private business, the domestic, who exhibited but little of the menial in his appearance, at once ushered him upstairs into the drawing-room, and here he found he was in the presence of Sir John Barrington himself.

With neither his intention changed from the courteous reception he received, nor with his confidence shaken by the keen eye that he found fixed upon him on his entrance, the Italian proceeded to apologise for his intrusion, and explained that he had been induced to call from a report of the baronet's liberality, and that he was deputed by a charitable institution, which he mentioned, to solicit Sir John's name as an addition to their lists of subscribers. To give a colouring to his statement, he produced the books of the institution that Jarvis had procured for him; and to show that his object was not that of fraudulently obtaining money, he said the name alone was all that he desired.

As, with well-feigned interest in the objects of the society, he drew the attention of the baronet to the present depressed condition of their funds, and enlarged upon the benefits that arose from the distribution, through that channel, of the public benevolence, he saw, with secret delight, the baronet receive his statement without suspicion, and heard with ill-disguised satisfaction the announcement of his intention to become a donor to the institution he had so disinterestedly advocated.

Having thus accounted for his motive in calling, his next anxiety was to secure the accomplishment of the atrocious purpose for which he came, and to do this the utmost extent of his ingenuity and dissimulation was called into action. He had, however, resolved upon his plan beforehand, and he was determined to suffer no minor obstacles to thwart him in its completion.

But as if the temptation had been purposely thrown in his way, and the opportunity he desired was created for him by some demon power by which he was aided, the baronet himself ordered wine to be placed upon the table, and a decanter and two glasses were promptly brought and deposited before them.

"You must permit me to offer you some trifling refreshment," said Barrington; "it is a custom of mine to suffer no visitor to quit my house without having treated him as a guest. You will therefore do me the favour to take a glass of wine before you leave."

Bazzini, with a gratification he could not wholly conceal, assented to the proposition that was made, and thanking the baronet for his kindness and unexpected hospitality, he hoped that his host would himself set the example.

"With pleasure," answered the other, good-humouredly; and filling his glass, he was about to raise it to his lips, when the door opened, and the swarthy attendant calling Sir John away for an instant to the adjoining apartment, he begged the Italian to excuse his company a moment, and left the wine untouched.

The delight of Bazzini at this additional facility that was afforded him gave a glow of exultation to his sinister visage, as, with a preparatory glance round the apartment, to see that he was unobserved, he drew the poisonous compound from his vest. Dashing aside a portion of the wine on the tray, as if it had been spilled there by accident, he filled up the glass with the contents of the phial, and had scarcely finished congratulating himself on the success of his visit, before the baronet returned and resumed his seat.

"I forgot to tell you," he continued, after regretting the interruption that had taken place, "that I have another custom which I am scrupulous in maintaining under this roof, and one that even on such trifling occasions as these, where other ceremony is dispensed with, I am still accustomed to exact."

"Indeed!" cried the Italian, somewhat disconcerted by the tone of frigid politeness in which he was addressed; "and pray may I inquire, Sir John, the nature of this custom you speak of?"

"It is only a foolish and fanciful habit of the East," rejoined the baronet, with a courteous smile that yet seemed to be endowed with a peculiar significance; "but having been so long a resident there, I am whimsical enough to desire its introduction into my own country."

"Indeed!" ejaculated the Italian, beginning to be alarmed at this strange preliminary, though he scarcely knew why; "and is it not known already among us?"

"You shall see and decide," was the reply, given in a deep emphatic voice, so different to his former silvery speech that the conscience-stricken criminal was startled by the contrast; "the custom I speak of is that of exchanging glasses with my guests before we

drink;" and as he spoke he placed the poisoned wine before his visitor.

With the ready apprehension of a man who, smitten with a sudden conviction of his guilt being known, requires no further accusation, Bazzini saw that by some inscrutable means his design had been anticipated, prepared for, and baffled at the very moment he had relied upon its success. From the fierce and resolute look he encountered he perceived how useless it would be to attempt to exculpate himself from the crime with which he stood committed, and in an instant he resolved upon the course he should adopt.

Dashing the glass down upon the carpet, so as to scatter its contents before they could be analysed, Bazzini sprang towards the door with the intention of darting down the staircase into the street; but as soon as he had flung it open, he was received in the muscular grasp of the swarthy domestic, and cast down prostrate on the floor. A stout rope, dexterously thrown as a noose over his shoulders, and drawn tightly round him, secured him from offering further resistance; and though grinding his teeth with savage vexation at the defeat he had sustained, Bazzini made only one ineffectual effort to get at a clasp knife he had about his person, and then feeling that he was helpless and powerless, surrendered himself, without a struggle, into the hands of his assailant.

"Capitally achieved, my worthy Oliver!" exclaimed the baronet, as soon as he saw the powerful arm of his domestic had kept the Italian secure; "the rascal has no chance with such a sturdy antagonist as yourself. You will be more cautious in your next attempt at murder," he continued, addressing himself to the fellow, who, in sullen apathy, was scowling ferociously at both; "but I am glad you were considerate enough to put me on my guard, by letting me hear the details of your plan, so that I might be prepared for your visit."

The Italian started, for he remembered that he had incidentally mentioned his intention to Borelli, when they were conversing by the brick-kilns in Agar Town, but he had no suspicion that the dialogue between them had been overheard by a listener who was passing at the time. It was his belief that Borelli had betrayed him, and he vowed to take a frightful revenge upon him if he could regain his liberty.

"What is the purpose for which I am detained here?" he asked, with a resolution to boldly encounter the danger to which he found himself exposed; "you have no proof against me, and you have no right, at least, to deprive me of my liberty."

"You will receive more mercy from me than you would have shown," returned the baronet; "but though I shall afterwards deliver you up to the proper administrators of justice, it is necessary that I should keep you prisoner here for a few hours, until other matters are disposed of that now require my attention."

"Shall I away with him at once, Sir John, to the room that we have got ready for him?" asked the attendant, who still retained his hold of the cords by which he had strongly bound the Italian.

"Stop," cried Barrington, "I mean first to make him assist me in the work that we have in hand. The fittest instruments for the punishment I would inflict are those who have been the abettors of the crime. Take this pencil," he added, turning to Bazzini, and placing the implements of writing before him, "and write the note that I shall dictate."

"Am I to be forced then, against my will, to criminate others?" demanded Bazzini; "do you think that I will lend myself to any such design?"

"We shall see," rejoined the baronet, tersely, as his hand moved towards the sideboard, and the click of a pistol sounded closely in the ear of the Italian; "you have found that the man with whom you have to deal is not to be trifled with. Refuse to do this, and I at once give you up to justice; but if you comply, and will afterwards give evidence against your accomplices, I will forgive you the attempt you have made against my life."

"I consent," muttered Bazzini, hoping, by affecting resignation, to devise some scheme of escape, "and will write what you require. But my arm, you see, is restrained."

"Loosen the cord round his right arm, Oliver," said Barrington; and he added, as his injunction was carried into effect, "remember that if you make the slightest effort to leave me, that instant you breathe your last. Your life hangs upon the touch of a trigger."

As Sir John Barrington stood over him with a loaded pocket-pistol brought close to his head, Bazzini took the pencil reluctantly in his hand and commenced writing the following at the dictation of the baronet:

"All is accomplished. The man whose enmity you had to dread will no longer prove an obstacle in your path, for before this reaches you he will have ceased to exist. There are reasons, however, that render it imperatively necessary for me to see you this evening. At eleven o'clock prepare to accompany the messenger that I send with this, and without asking further questions. He will bring you where I am.

"PIETRO BAZZINI."

"Now direct it to Mr. Jarvis," insisted the baronet, as, having followed with his eye the lines that the Italian had written, he saw that the note was concluded.

Bazzini sighed deeply as he did so, but he submitted with as good a grace as he could, in the hope that a chance of escape might be afforded before the hour arrived.

Acting under the direction of Barrington, the sturdy fellow who had waited in attendance now restored the bonds by which the Italian was secured, and the baronet then employing the same compulsory means, had him conveyed to a vacant room at the summit of the house, where, threatening him again with instant death if he stirred, he left him to the miserable refuge of his own reflections.

As he heard the sound of the key turned in the lock,—a strong iron fastening recently affixed, and which acquainted him with the extent of the precautions that had been taken to keep him a prisoner, for what purpose he knew not,—Bazzini gave vent to a torrent of passionate imprecations at the unexpected result of his mission. He cursed the day on which he had renewed his acquaintance with Jarvis, and bitterly reproached himself for the assistance he had afforded. How his design had been suspected he was at a loss to conceive; but it was evident that the baronet had anticipated, and prepared for his coming.

Whether to charge Borelli with being the origin of this, or whether he should impute it to some mismanagement on the part of Jarvis, he was undecided; but it was palpable that he had been made the victim in some way or other, and he swore to trace out and revenge himself on the cause of his capture. To do

this he had yielded more quietly than he otherwise would have done, for he hoped by his passive submission to impress the baronet with a belief in his innocence, or at least to make him less particular in the arrangements made for his detention. He felt, besides, how fruitless would have been a struggle with the man, who flung him down as easily as he would have wrestled with a child, and whose muscular grasp, as he felt in the indentation made in his arm, was like the gripe of a vice. Conscious, therefore, that his own strength was no match for that of his antagonist, he saw that his only chance of flight was to tamely acknowledge the superiority of his opponents, and take the first opportunity that might present itself for effecting his release.

The room in which he was confined was a small unfurnished apartment at the top of the house, and along the window-frame were fixed stout iron bars that would have prevented the attempt of any person to pass through the casement, even had the close proximity of the parapet not proved of itself an effectual barrier. Deprived of the means of escape in that direction, he next examined the lock of the door, but its ponderous security soon convinced him that, with no other help than that offered by the clasp knife he still retained secreted in his vest, it would be useless to make an effort against it. With this knife he severed the ropes that had bound his wrists, and as he did so the hollow sound of the partition, as it was struck by the accidental recoil of his hand, suggested the possibility of another expedient that was likely to be more efficacious. Striking the knife into the wall, and forcing an aperture through it at the place where the wainscotting seemed most easily penetrable, he was enabled to obtain a glimpse of the adjoining room, which he found was similarly untenanted. A further experimental survey of the wall showed him that it was of uneven thickness, and that at the place he had first tried it was possible for a breach to be effected.

He stretched himself upon the ground and listened at the door: all was still. It was evident that, relying upon the security of the fastenings, it had been thought unnecessary to leave a person behind to take care of the man who was imprisoned within the room. He was thus relieved from his principal source

of apprehension, and he now commenced his work of liberation in earnest.

Cutting his way through the wall, tearing down one impediment, wrenching off another, and making the fragments of lath and plaster fly about his head in a dusty cloud, that filled the room with a choking mist of limy particles, Bazzini was able in about half an hour to clear an aperture sufficiently large to admit his body passing through, and by means of the gap thus formed he trusted to obtain his extrication. Emerging from the room where he had been incarcerated into the next, he saw to his delight that the window was unprotected by any of the bars that had been raised around the former one, and that the parapet so receded at this point that he could work his way between the shelving ledge of the window and the coping-stone beyond.

Clambering over the casement, for the framework was immoveable below, he passed along the lofty parapet, and steadying himself as he went by the sloping roof, he crept cautiously over the ridge that separated the house he had left from the adjoining one, and reaching the flat surface of the leads beyond, he stopped an instant to look from the giddy height that he had attained and consider his future movements. Around him were the tall clusters of chimneys, casting forth from their dark mouths thick soot-laden columns of dingy smoke, that rolled away over the house-tops in undulating folds, and only revealed at misty intervals the pile of buildings behind. Below he saw the diminished forms of passers by, traversing a pavement narrowed to a slender stony line, and the figures in the square beyond, reduced to miniature dimensions, were gliding about among the stunted trees in dreamy indistinctness.

He looked before him, and he saw a broad chasm in the range of houses that warned him of the impossibility of continuing his progress in that direction, and it was thus certain that he must either abandon his hope of escape, or find some opening for descent from the flat leads on the summit of which he stood.

Nerving himself for a desperate effort, he rose from his recumbent position, and standing erect upon the frail ledge of stonework that formed the outer boundary of the roof, he passed onward to the stack of chimneys that stretched right athwart his path. Along this dangerous summit, so narrow that his feet were unable to tread the ledge together, he slowly crawled, until he had gained the wider and securer standing. Here a false step, a crumbling brick, or a slippery hold, would have hurled him headlong down; but he kept his footing unshaken, and with suspended breath he clung to the iron braces that were driven in various places into the brickwork, and ultimately reached the opposite side of the apparent barrier in safety.

There was a window now observable, that belonged to what appeared to be the back attic of the house over the roof of which he had performed his perilous and daring journey. To lean over the parapet, ascertain that there was no occupant, and glide along the rain-pipe that ran beneath the casement, was an exploit of an equally hazardous character with that which he had just accomplished; but he brought his utmost courage and dexterity to the task, and he succeeded. He descended in safety into the room, and then cautiously opening the door, he listened attentively for some sound of voices, but he was speedily convinced, on a closer examination of the premises, that the house was at that time unoccupied, and was, in fact, a mansion he had noticed, on his way through the square, as having been placarded with a bill that announced it to be to let. Emboldened by this discovery, he hurried down the stairs, threw open the street-door, and though eager to leave a neighbourhood where he risked the chance of being recognised, he took the precaution of adopting a moderate pace to avoid attention, and only quickened his steps when he turned into an adjacent thoroughfare.

Having in this manner eluded the restraint which the baronet had imposed upon him, Bazzini hurried through the streets towards the abode of Borelli, from whom he was anxious to first gain the intelligence of the way in which his design had been thwarted, and with the intention of employing the same deadly poison against his comrade should he find out that the information that had been given emanated from the quarter he had supposed.

There was, besides this, their joint project to be undertaken the same night, when the bribe of one thousand pounds was to be extorted from Celestine at the villa; and as it was already approaching dusk, he determined to proceed there first, and satisfy himself on that point before he ran the risk of being foiled a second time, should he venture singly to keep the appointment. The league he had entered into with Jarvis had become too dangerous to be renewed, and he therefore resolved upon leaving him to defend himself for the present, and make use, on his own account, of the letters he had obtained, when a fitting time occurred. The money he expected to procure from his alleged daughter would, with the funds he had acquired in other nefarious ways, assist his flight to the Continent, and there he intended to remain concealed until the affair in which he was involved had blown over.

To get rid of the dust and dirt that had been left upon his garments by the series of adventures through which he had passed, he turned aside into a public-house in Tottenham Court Road, and, entering the parlour, called for a dram of brandy, which his exhaustion rendered necessary to recruit his strength.

Whilst occupied in the removal of the incrustation from his clothes, a man, attired as a bricklayer, came into the room, and looking inquisitively at the spots of lime that Bazzini was rubbing off his coat, he said in a familiar strain of jocose pleasantry:

"You seem, master, to have been doing a little work in my way, by your appearance; for if you had scrambled over a housetop you couldn't have got more of the signs of my craft about you."

The observation was accidental, but it struck the Italian to have a deeper meaning than the words conveyed; and thinking that he was suspected of having committed a burglary, and afraid of being detained on that suspicion, he gave a brief reply to the man, and, hastily tossing off the brandy, stopped but for a minute to resume the coat he had taken off, and hurried out of the room.

As he passed by the bar, on his way to the outer door of the tavern, a cabman, who had just entered, called for a quartern of gin, and, as he began pouring out the spirit, he heard him say to the loungers who were round him:

"There's a rare fire to be seen blazing away down Holborn; the flames are shooting up into the sky in grand style."

"Whereabouts is it, sir, do you think?" asked an old apple-woman, who, treating herself to a quiet glass of her favourite cordial, had left her stall at the corner to the protection of the crossing-sweeper, whilst she took her evening refreshment.

The Italian paused with the rest to hear the reply.

"It's at a distillery, they say, down by one of the streets turning out of Leather Lane," said the cab man, finishing his glass; "if any body likes to see it I'll drive 'em down as near as I can for a shilling."

"I will take your offer," exclaimed Bazzini, who, from this information, could not help acting upon a presentiment that the lodging-house of Borelli was in danger; "quick, let us lose no time."

"All right, sir," rejoined the cabman, bustling through the door, as he added, for the satisfaction of the apple-woman, "I always likes to catch a fare when I can," and clambering up to his box whilst the Italian threw himself on to the seat inside, the horse was turned rapidly round, and away went the vehicle, splashing and tearing along in the direction where the conflagration was visible.

As Bazzini, leaning out of the window, anxiously looked towards the neighbourhood where the fire had broken out, he was, with every step that brought him nearer to the spot, more and more convinced that the distillery was the scene of the disaster; and as he knew that the premises extended to the back of the court which Borelli inhabited, he was doubly anxious to encounter the padrone before the confusion of the place made the chances of their meeting less likely.

The barrier formed by a dense crowd pushing on to the same destination brought the cab to a stand-still at the end of Gray's Inn Lane, and alighting from the vehicle, Bazzini gave the amount of his fare to the driver with impetuous haste, and forcing his way into the midst of the mob, he worked out a path towards the fire, squeezed himself into the foremost ranks, and arrived at the head of the throng. The sky, illumined with the red glare, and overspread with a stifling canopy of smoke, through which myriads of sparks shot wildly upwards in a burst of brilliant coruscations, reflected a lurid light on the upturned faces of the multitude, and gave a distinct outline to the features of each, that rendered them as distinguishable as in the broad daylight. At rapid intervals sheets of quivering flame obtained a momentary ascendancy; and then, as the torrents of water poured down upon the burning mass stopped for an instant the raging element of fire, a dark cloud of smoke would pass over the blazing pile, and the glittering rocket-like burst of sparks returned.

Amidst all this was heard the crash of falling timbers, and the deafening shouts of the throng, who seemed, with careless jest and delighted eye, to welcome the event as a revel in which they had a right to participate, and the sight of the conflagration as a glorious exhibition got up for their especial entertainment.

The efforts of the police to keep back the crowd, the roaring sound of the water as it fell upon the seething beams, the tearing up of fresh engines to the spot, the cool bravery and unflinching intrepidity of the untiring firemen, and the other innumerable concomitants of a scene of this kind, too familiar to need repetition, imparted to Bazzini a share of the frenzied excitement that was possessed by the spectators.

He broke through the crowd at his side, fought his way into the court, and having reached the house rented by Borelli, which was at the back of the blazing building, he dashed into the interior to see if he could meet with him. A boy, crouched upon the staircase, cowering down in alarm, and too much stupefied by terror to escape, told him that the padrone had gone to the top of the house to watch the progress of the flames, and thither accordingly Bazzini followed in pursuit. The staircase was lit up with the glare of the conflagration; and readily finding his way to the roof, he sprang out upon the leads, and sought the man whom he had mentally taxed with being his betrayer. Borelli, however, was not visible; and as, in answer to his call, there was no response, he was on the point of returning, when he fancied that he caught a view of the padrone's figure passing over the wall, and receding amidst the smoke, as if he had retreated when he saw the Italian approach.

Confirmed in his supposition by this apparent wish of the fugitive to avoid a collision, Bazzini darted after him in the same direction; and with the agility of a cat, and at heart the ferocity of a tiger, he made his way along the top of the wall surrounding the distillery, and strove to overtake him. A sudden blaze of light shot like lightning across the ruins; at the instant he came upon an iron gallery that spanned what appeared to him to be a vast cylinder below, and this had revealed to him Borelli's form standing at the opposite extremity.

With the design of there wreaking the terrible vengeance he contemplated, he ran across the bridge, when, deceived by the false shadows that were cast upon his path, his foot slipped, his body swirled over into the huge round copper vessel below, and his weight striking against the metal base, sent a hollow ringing reverberation around the towering sides of the gigantic vat in which he was engulphed.

As soon as he regained his footing, the tremendous horror of his situation became apparent. He found himself in a large empty cylinder, that, from the intense heat that was encircling it, had now become nearly red hot.

In vain he essayed to clamber up the sides. The effort burned and blistered his hands as he touched the almost incandescent metal, and there seemed to be no refuge open to him from the most acute and agonising death—that of being burned alive. He shouted for rescue, but his voice was drowned in the clattering echo of the horrible prison in which he had become entrapped; yet, though his throat was parched and scorching, he still continued his fruitless cries for release. The corrosive poison that he had gone that day to administer would have produced, he knew, exactly the same torture that he was then undergoing; but the struggle for existence was here rendered more appalling from the conviction that, as the heat grew still greater, he might count the duration of his life by minutes.

A few moments passed away, in the course of which he suffered an age of remorse, and he felt the soles of his feet, that rested on the lower surface of the metal, were becoming blistered by the overpowering heat. The smoke, too, that filled the cylinder, had grown so dense and suffocating, that though he had twisted a handkerchief across his mouth to prevent being choked and stifled with the sultry vapour, the difficulty of breathing was getting more painful with the lapse of every second, and all hope of attracting attention by his voice was consequently at an end. New torments now followed. A steam exuded from the dampness of his hair, and then left it so dry and crisp that he could feel it crumble into powder between his fingers; his nails got brittle and charred with the intensity of the fire, and his eyeballs seemed to have been scorched into blindness. Dizzied with the maddening contemplation of his position, despairing of relief, and writhing under the frightful agonies that he was

doomed to experience, the power of suffering seemed to have been carried to the utmost capability of endurance, as well as the acutest pitch of torture. At last there came to his relief a merciful dispensation of utter insensibility. Suffocated by the smoke, Bazzini sank down into a state of stupor, and all that followed was a blank of welcome unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE VAULTS.

About an hour after the attempt of the murderous miscreant had been frustrated, and when it was supposed that the Italian was securely incarcerated in the apartment which had been prepared for his reception, the mysterious personage known as Sir John Barrington issued from his dressing-room, and was immediately met by the faithful domestic who had so ably assisted in the overthrow of Bazzini.

But it was not in the fashionable costume which he had worn during that eventful interview that Barrington now appeared. His dress had been exchanged for one of a less noticeable kind, and his exterior had undergone so complete a metamorphosis, that it was scarcely possible to regard him as being the same man who had crossed the threshold of his room so short a time before. His eyes were still brilliantly keen and penetrating, but they were overhung by thick bushy eyebrows that were not before visible, and which wholly changed their expression; the face was darkened, and a mass of coarse wiry hair that streamed from under the military cap he wore gave a wild and haggard look to his features that strongly contrasted with his previously neat and orderly attire; whilst a plain frock coat, buttoned up to the throat, and a roquelaure thrown loosely over his shoulders, completed this most efficient disguise. The remarkable difference arising from this alteration of apparel, and the change in his identity so artistically produced, even elicited a complimentary remark from the attendant, who had been long familiar with these masquerading habiliments, which were varied from time to time as circumstances required their assumption.

"You have truly little occasion to fear recognition in that dress, Sir John," observed the swarthy attendant, who appeared to be the only person about the mansion that came into the presence of its owner; "never have I before seen you so completely and impenetrably disguised."

"There is more need now than ever, John, of keeping my real name concealed, and of baffling the observation of those who might hereafter identify me," returned the baronet, traversing the apartment in which the recent struggle with the Italian had taken place, and approaching the window that commanded a full view of the street leading to the square; "is it not near the hour when you ordered the cabriolet to be here?"

"It yet wants forty minutes to the time," answered the other, referring to a watch he withdrew from his pocket; and then looking significantly at the disguised baronet, he added, "there is one who might think the hours sped too rapidly if he knew the changes in his fortune that to-night would bring forth."

"Mine has been a bold and adventurous experiment," mused Barrington, in a reflective tone, whilst he still directed his attention to the view from the window; "but the game once commenced must be played out to the last card. I should account myself fortunate," he continued, turning to the domestic as he spoke, "that I have an auxiliary so trustworthy and competent as John Oliver."

"It is, on the contrary, I, Sir John, who should acknowledge with gratitude the eminent services you have rendered me; for without your kind assistance, and the generous help you afforded me when I most required a friend, I should have been now utterly abandoned. Was it not you who took me into your confidence when every other eye looked coldly on me, and restored to me that self-respect which but for you would have been irretrievably lost?"

"And in so doing I was only striving to fulfil that office which I felt it was my duty to perform. The impulse that directed me to the place where you had been left for dead by the now repentant Saunders was not given in vain. The day that saw you restored to health likewise beheld your character retrieved, and your zeal and fidelity to me since that hour have left me nothing to regret."

"And my old companion—is he, indeed, Sir John reclaimed from those vicious courses into which he was led, more by his necessities than inclination? has he really been sincere in the remorse that he has lately shown?"

"Of that I am convinced. I told him the man he had struck down in a momentary fit of passion, and believed he had murdered, was still living, and that he would be his companion on the voyage. His delight when I thus relieved his mind of the burden of a crime which he had felt hanging over his career like a dark cloud, was so unaffected, and so earnest in its nature, that I repented never having made him acquainted with the truth before. Often, however, as I have availed myself of the power over him which my accidental meeting with you gave me, never have I employed it for any other than a good purpose."

"Till now, Sir John," said Oliver, breaking in upon a pause that had followed the last observation of the baronet, "I have implicitly followed your instructions, without seeking to learn their motives; but now that we are to separate, that a close acquaintanceship will have to be renewed with Saunders and the rest who will emigrate with him to the Australian estate you have purchased for us, there is a question of deep interest to me that I should like to ask."

"Your inquiry refers to the mystery I assumed with this very disguise in which I now appear, does it not?"

"If you would believe that I am actuated by no impertinent curiosity in thus forcing myself into your confidence, I would acknowledge that it does," admitted Oliver, bowing respectfully.

"You have partly anticipated my intention of making this disclosure," rejoined the baronet, "for now the objects I have had in view are nearly gained, there no longer exists a reason for continuing its concealment. As I have besides exalted you to the position of my factor in Australia, and confided to you the entire management of the plan, which I fervently hope will be the means of restoring happiness to many a poor but deserving family, it is necessary that you should be informed of the circumstances that led to this determination originally."

"From one who has daily given such proofs of the benevolence and nobleness of his disposition, I am well aware no other impulse was needed than the spirit of philanthropy, which I have observed has governed all your actions, Sir John, since you first honoured me with your notice. But often as I have been made the almoner of your bounty, and frequently

as I have longed to tell the grateful persons yon assisted who their benefactor was, the restriction of secrecy you imposed upon me has kept me silent, and I dared not intrude upon that confidence which you withheld from others."

"I am undeserving of these good opinions," replied Barrington, with a wave of the hand that suppressed the eulogies to which Oliver was about giving utterance; "and I disclaim all praise for what I have done. I must again, however, require yon to keep unrevealed the particulars of my past history that I am now about to make known to you."

The faithful secretary reiterated his promise of sacredly preserving inviolate the communication with which he might be entrusted, and Barrington proceeded:

"The work of charity, to which you have seen me so assidnously devote myself, was not, my worthy confidant, undertaken altogether in that pure spirit which yon believe. I took upon myself this mission as an atonement for my own errors, as an expiation of that crime which I was daily committing, in order to obtain the means of reaching the point of my ambition, and happy was I when I succeeded in gaining that at which I aimed. Yes, Oliver, I, whose character you have hitherto deemed so spotless and unsullied, have been guilty of a crime of that magnitude that would make society recoil from the daring adventurer by whom it was perpetrated."

"You—yon guilty of a crime like this!" ejaculated Oliver incredulously, "you who have been so actively engaged in the reformation of criminals—impossible!"

"Yes," affirmed Barrington, emphatically, "yon behold in me one who has forged notes upon the Bank of England to the amount of seven hundred thousand pounds, and yon have been, in many instances, yourself the agent by whom the forgeries were disseminated through different mercantile channels."

"Have I then been the unconscious utterer of forged notes, the accomplice in so vast a scheme of fraud, and knew it not?" exclaimed Oliver in alarm, and looking aghast at the baronet as he pictured the liabilities of such a daring and extensive issue of counterfeit currency; "what will be the consequences when this is discovered, as it must be in the end?"

"None that yon need apprehend danger from," added Barrington, with a smile of satisfaction that allayed the frightful forebodings the other had begun to entertain; "all is discovered, but at the same time all has been repaid."

"Repaid! This is a puzzle that I cannot comprehend."

"Listen. Circumstances, which I have before hinted at as being the source of Jarvis's inveterate enmity, obliged me seven years since to quit this country, beggared in prospects and ruined in reputation. I was resolved to retrieve both, and to do so I was determined to devote my best energies to what then seemed a hopeless task. I had a twin brother at Madras, in the service of government, and to him, after being wrecked in the vessel in which I first embarked, and escaping as the sole survivor, I ventured to apply for assistance. I found him unhappily at the point of death, his finances involved in great confusion, and utterly unable to relieve me, from his own resources having been exhausted. Whilst I was with him he died, and as his funeral was conducted in the greatest privacy, and the similarity between us was so remarkable as to attract general observation, I was reminded that, by practising a harmless deception, I could return to England, and present myself in a manner that would excite no suspicion of my identity."

"And it was, then, under the assumption of your brother's name that yon first became my adviser and employer?" responded Oliver.

"It was so—but I had heard of you before; and knowing that you had been intended for a better position than that to which idleness and evil companionship had degraded you, I sought to befriend you, Oliver, as I wished myself to have been befriended. But to return: my brother, who, from having had a sum of money bequeathed to him, had changed his name to that of the testator, according to the terms of the bequest, had got knighted during his official service; and his income having been lessened materially by the exertions he made to sustain his newly-acquired dignities, I found the only legacy I inherited was his wardrobe, together with a few letters and papers that I afterwards had occasion to use as proofs of my being the individual whose name and position I assumed. On my arrival in this country the want of funds so seriously militated against the designs I had formed, that I was obliged to consider the quickest and most effective means of creating a fortune; and then it was that a hint thrown out by a skilful note-forger, who was a fellow voyager of mine, hastening to give another country the benefit of his skill, suggested the hazardous plan I afterwards pursued. I studied the art of counterfeiting notes by a new process; and disguising myself so completely that none could recognise me as the same, I day by day forged, in one capacity, the notes I so easily got rid of in another. As rapidly as I produced my false coinage, I got it transmuted into genuine gold, and, as you know, embarked in every speculation that promised to yield a prompt and remunerative return. The result of these investments far exceeded all the anticipations I formed of them; and, like one who, trading on a borrowed capital, is at last enabled to pay back the principal, and retire upon the overplus he has acquired through those means, I was in a position finally to lay by an amount of real wealth equal to that which I had provided myself with as fictitious, and still retain a considerable surplus at my disposal. Yesterday I had an interview with the directors of the Bank of England, gave them back, in their own notes, all that I had deprived them of through mine, and then revealed to them the process by which they had been manufactured, and the almost imperceptible clue that would lead to their detection. The information thus communicated was considered to be so important, that I gained what I had at first stipulated for—an immunity from all proceedings that might be hereafter taken; and as the notes now in circulation are called in, the owners will be reimbursed from the fund I have left for the purpose; and I have in this way enriched myself, without ultimately injuring society."

"And the disguises successively assumed——"

"Were for the purpose of aiding my projects and enshrouding the unlawful manufacture of these notes in an impenetrable cloud of mystery," added Barrington. "The same means I adopted for my concealment gave me the opportunity besides of finding out those who were deserving of assistance, and as a slight atonement for the fraud I was daily practising, I devoted half of its produce to the rescue of the unfortunate, and the reclaiming of those offenders whose crimes were more the result of a bad example than the consequences of a bad heart."

"And how triumphantly you have carried out this noble ambition of raising the oppressed and the erring to a creditable station in society, the grateful hearts of many hundreds could proudly testify. Never was wealth so illegally acquired so generously and discriminately appropriated. But the attempt upon your life that was made by this assassin you will surely not suffer to escape unpunished?"

"No," answered Barrington, "but his punishment must be inflicted by other hands than mine. It was my original intention to have enforced his absence from England, as well as that of the scoundrel by whom he was employed; but further intelligence of the extent of his roguery, and the knowledge I have gained of certain other atrocities in which he was concerned, will compel me to retain him in custody until I have conferred with those whom he has likewise attempted to injure. The abduction of Jarvis is all that is required for my own safety, and when he knows that his plans have been discovered and his iniquities have been recorded by his own accomplice, he will doubtless be glad to resign himself to whatever discipline you may think necessary for his security."

The arrival of a close cabriolet at the door interrupted the reply of Oliver, and as Sir John Barrington then descended to the vehicle, with his ample cloak folded round him, and concealing the peculiarities of the dress he wore beneath, he whispered hurriedly some parting instructions to his attendant, and was driven off immediately afterwards over Westminster Bridge and towards the Waterloo Road.

The driver, who had previously received his directions, stopped short in one of the bye-streets, and there the passenger alighted. Passing down the thoroughfare without being observed, as the deepening twilight had now cast its dusky mantle over the streets, he entered the house which has been before described as having a communication with the range of vaults underground.

Procuring a light from the inner room, where he always retained a lamp in readiness, Barrington descended to the lower portion of the building, and uplifting the ponderous trap-door that gave him access to the subterranean passages below, he began again to traverse that dark and mysterious region.

A rapid inspection of the materials he had concealed there sufficed to convince him the place had been undisturbed since his last visit; and now collecting them, he began to apply himself to the task of destroying those secret implements which had enabled him to amass a real fortune by the judicious employment of the fictitious wealth he had created. Not venturing to entrust a work of so much importance to other hands than his own, he commenced by removing all the combustible portion to the rusty grate of the kitchen above, and consigned the remainder to a place that had been excavated in the building, and which would serve the purpose of concealment until all that might lead to identify them or betray the use to which they had been applied would have rusted and rotted away.

Some time had elapsed since so cheerful a blaze had flung its ruddy glare on those damp and mildewed walls; the crackling of the wood, the flames kindling a genial light around, the shadows cast by the flickering fuel on the gloomy sides of the room, and the enlivening aspect that a glowing hearth imparts to the most desolate tenement, united to produce an inspiriting effect on the mind of Barrington. As he watched the gradual combustion of the agents by which he had effected his daring forgeries, his face brightened with a smile of satisfaction, and his thoughts appeared to be relieved of a weight that had long oppressed them.

"There," said he, as he pondered over the dying embers, "lie the last vestiges of my crime; and with them, I trust, will expire all of guilt with which they were associated. All that I have struggled for is at length attained; the curse that hung over me is removed—the beacon that shed a light over the troubled ocean of my life has led me safely through the treacherous quicksands that threatened to wreck my happiness, and the shadows now clear away from the darkness of the future. I have redeemed my honour, and the reputation that I have lost, through the temptation of that human fiend who taught me to turn aside from the paths of virtue, shall be fully restored before the innocent children I have wronged shall be clasped in these arms that are yearning to embrace them. "Yes," he soliloquised, "I have erred, deeply erred; but the atonement I have offered for my errors will, I fervently pray, be received as no unworthy offering at that tribunal where justice is tempered by mercy, and the sin is weighed according to the motive that prompted its commission."

A peculiar knock at the door, that he interpreted as the signal he had been expecting, recalled him from his reverie, and withdrawing the bolt, Slogger, followed by Saunders and Gubbins, crossed the threshold, and were received into the basement floor, where the entrance to the vaults could be rendered available at a moment's notice.

"I believe we are true to our engagement," exclaimed Saunders, who, from the habitual authority he exercised, naturally became spokesman for the rest; "Slogger has been our guide, and he has not suffered us to loiter on the way."

"You are in excellent time, and there is an hour or two to pass away before I shall have occasion to make a demand upon your services," said the disguised baronet in reply; "you have therefore an opportunity of retracting even now from your bargain, if you consider that the conditions I made are too severe for your acceptance."

"I am willing to abide by them," rejoined Saunders; "and for my comrades, I can answer for them. We are all of us too eager to embrace the chance of retrieving our characters to hesitate at undertaking the voyage. But," he continued in a lower tone, and addressing himself exclusively to the baronet, "I had expected to have found another here besides ourselves, and one who was to accompany us?"

"John Oliver?"

"The same. I know the promise you made was not lightly given; but my desire to speak to one for whom I have so much mourned makes me anxious for its fulfilment."

"You will not have long to wait before he arrives," answered Barrington; "but there will be here no leisure for you to indulge in more than the recognition of a glance. He will be your friend as well as your employer for the future; and so that the good conduct of those whom he employs is found worthy of such consideration, he will prove a liberal and a lenient landlord. It is on his estate that your labour will be first required and rewarded."

"Well, so that by honest industry I can better my fortunes, I care not under what sky I labour," responded the coiner; "the two you want us to entrap will be here with him, I suppose?"

"There is but one who will be committed to your charge," resumed Barrington; "and as he unfortu-

nately possesses not one estimable quality, you need not afterwards reproach your conscience with the part you will have to play in his abduction. I would have him live to repent of his evil ways, but so great is the artful hypocrisy which he is capable of practising, that the utmost vigilance will be required on your part to retain him in that close subjection which he must be held in during the voyage."

"And for the money—the six hundred pounds that was mentioned?"

"Oliver, who will give you further instructions relative to the man you will this night remove, has been empowered to pay you half as soon as you reach the vessel, and the remainder will be shared among you on your arrival."

"I have no more to speak of," said Saunders, thoughtfully, "except that I am at a loss to know who you can be that, in so brief a time, seem to have established such an authority over all around you. I begin to suspect that, when you first visited my abode, it was not altogether the want of spurious currency that brought you to the spot."

"Perhaps you are not quite wrong in that supposition," returned Barrington, with a smile; "but Oliver may some day furnish you with a solution to the mystery. At present I prefer keeping my secret to myself. You will find," he continued, "that every necessary preparation for your voyage has been made. Your outfits are all on board, and every arrangement has been provided that has been thought needful for your comfort on arrival."

Another summons at the outer door was heard.

"It is the man I spoke of," exclaimed Barrington, eagerly; "he is earlier than I anticipated; quick, to this room, until I give the signal for your approach. Then throwing your muffler over his head, and fastening his arms back, he must be conveyed through the vaults to the coach, according to the directions I before gave you."

Concealing the three men in a back room, Barrington repaired to the door, and admitted Oliver and the wily Jarvis, who had been decoyed thither by the note Bazzini had been forced to indite. Disguising his voice, he invited the unconscious agent below; and the last step of the staircase had been no sooner reached, than Jarvis heard the name of Mordaunt thundered in his ear, and at the same instant a cloak was thrown over his head, his arms were pinioned behind him, and he was borne along the passage towards the vaults where Saunders and Oliver, who had exchanged a few rapid words of greeting, were in readiness to receive him.

The subterranean labyrinth was threaded with facility by Slogger, who, with the lantern in his hand, served as a guide to the party through the dark mazy region of which he so well knew the windings. At the other extremity they emerged upon the gateway, and with the same dexterous and almost noiseless movements, they passed under the arch, crossed into the street, and nearly simultaneously they entered the coach that had been drawn up close to the kerb in readiness.

Saunders and his two accomplices took their involuntary companion into the body of the vehicle. Oliver mounted to the box, and without a further syllable being exchanged on either side, the entire party, with the exception of the principal instigator, was driven off to the docks, where they were conveyed in a few minutes afterwards to an emigrant ship, that was only waiting the turn of the morning tide to commence her voyage to Australia.

"Thus," soliloquised Barrington, as he saw them depart, "is the fate of my wife avenged. He can now live for repentance, and deep as are the injuries he has inflicted upon me, I wish him no severer punishment than the accusation of an awakening conscience. As the vessel calls off Plymouth, I shall there hasten to give my parting encouragement to the deserving families whom I have sent out; and at the same time I shall add my crowning curse to embitter the reflections of Jarvis—the knowledge of whose hand struck the blow that with retributive justice has consigned him to the imprisonment of a foreign land, as he hoped to have once banished myself."

With the contemplation of this journey before him, on the following day Barrington turned his footsteps back to the vaults, having confidence sufficient in the faithful emissary that he had sent forward to carry out his designs, to know that nothing of importance would be forgotten.

There were two surprises that, however, awaited him on his return to the mansion he occupied in Manchester Square: one was the flight of the Italian, and the other the perusal of a letter delivered during his absence, that bore the signature of the earl's physician, and solicited his earliest attendance at Winterton House.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LAST ADVENTURE OF BOB CHUCKERS.

It was a merry day for Bob Chuckers when he got up one morning and found a letter that informed him how an old aunt of his in the country had bequeathed to him a small legacy; but it was both a merrier and a prouder day for him when he felt the result of this sudden accession of fortune fully developed in the unquestionable and undisputed proprietorship of a small shop which he had been wistfully looking at some week or so before. It was only after a considerable degree of forethought and consideration had been exercised that he came to decide permanently upon the advantage of so bold a step; but having had a long debate within himself, wherein his inclination took a prominent part in the discussion, he at last resolved to secede from the establishment in which he had been hitherto retained as an assistant, and become his own master.

He accordingly took possession of it, with the stock and fixtures, at a valuation; and as the shop was double-fronted, with periodicals and stationery in one window, and boxes of cigars and trays of tobacco liberally displayed in the other one, he aspired to great ideas of profit from the junction of the dual trades. His friend Grigg, the ticket-writer, was employed to invent attractive labels for both departments; a boy was hired to assist in the establishment, and look after it in the occasional absence of the owner. And when Chuckers came forth and saw his own name substantially painted over the facia above, a memorable thrill of pride went through him that disturbed his nerves like a shock of electricity. During the first day of his initiation he wrote letters to all the friends he knew—a proceeding that materially lessened the stock in one window, whilst the prompt response of personal applications at night considerably diminished the display in the other, and caused the profit on cigars to be smoked away anticipatively for the next quarter.

However, he got steadier after a week's experience, and began to have a proper tradesmanlike appreciation

of the till, into the contents whereof he would keep up an incessant investigation at all hours of the day. Then he would be frequently running outside, to see whether he had dressed his windows up with all the attractions of which they were susceptible; and on his return it was pleasant to see him coaxing a stick of sealing-wax into a more irresistible angle, or propping up an envelope-box into that tempting position that its gaping lid seemed to be calling out for a purchaser; whilst the bundles of cubas were so picturesquely piled up in pyramids, with the points thrust invitingly forth, that they made the very lips of the passers-by moisten as they gazed upon them.

But the snug little back-parlour, that was at the end of the shop, was the haven where he delighted to rest when the business of the day was over; and here would he sit, smoke, and dream over the prospective fortune that he believed himself destined to make some day, until, like a small Sir Walter Raleigh, he would shadow forth an El Dorado behind his two counters. It is true that now and then a sense of loneliness would steal upon him, and he would draw his arm-chair closer up to the blazing fire, and sigh for the domestic companionship that the vacancy in the opposite corner suggested.

And perhaps, in the whole range of those influences that daily impress their effect upon humanity, there is nothing like firelight to call forth the genial emotions of the heart; to evoke those retrospective images that cling about the memory; to rouse into kindred warmth those better feelings of our nature that are frozen by the contact of chilling ordinary realities. The fireside is the shrine where all our petty bickerings, our minor annoyances, our mere business perplexities may be daily offered up as an acceptable sacrifice. Our social sympathies are expanded into a genial glow; the fancy is cradled in its cheerful blaze, and fed by its fostering flame.

He was in one of these retrospective moods, thinking of a certain young lady who had been the "first love" of his early days, and speculating on the possibility of ever meeting her again, when the creaking tread of a customer in the shop roused him from his reverie, and starting up, he saw, to his immeasurable delight, that the face of the intending purchaser belonged to an old schoolfellow who had been likewise separated from him for some time by the different bent of their avocations.

"What! the immortal Dick?" exclaimed Chuckers, as he passed round the counter and grasped his friend's digits with a hearty squeeze, and a conviction that, notwithstanding his extravagant salutation, he was only shaking hands with corporeal clay. "If there is one person more than another I wished to see, Dick Jones is the man; but how did you come to find me out?"

"Soon told," said that individual, responding to Bob's earnest greeting with the same cordiality, and yielding to his invitation to penetrate the little sanctum at the back; "just left the office—got a week's holiday—strolling down the street—wanted my cigar-case filled—looked up—saw the name of Chuckers over the door—thought it was you—and here I am."

"And delighted I am to meet with you," added Bob, giving the fire an extra poke in honour of his arrival; "comfortably settled here you see—not been in the business a month, but now getting on famously. Gave ten pounds for the 'good-will' as they call it, but had very little good from it yet. There is every prospect of my making a profitable thing out of it, however, by and bye; for my connection is evidently increasing already. Yesterday there wasn't a soul came in all day, but I have had two here since this morning, even without counting you."

"Two!" laughed his companion. "Why you are driving a roaring trade."

"Yes—what they came for wasn't very remunerative, certainly. One wanted change for a shilling, and the other to know where the post-office was; but I expect great things from the new labels Grigg has done for me. You have heard of Grigg, of course?"

"Can't say I have," replied the other, establishing himself in a chair by the fireplace, and familiarly naturalising his feet to the fender; "but since it is you, and I have found you at home, I may at once deliver a special communication, with which I was entrusted for your particular ear."

"A special communication!" echoed Chuckers, opening his eyes to their fullest extent. "They haven't been asking in the Home Office whether I should like to be prime minister a little while, eh?"

"No, my mission is more of a private nature," returned Mr. Richard Jones, who held himself a government situation in Somerset House, and was presumed to have an enviable acquaintance with diplomatic secrets; "I mean to astonish you."

"Blaze away!" said Bob, metaphorically. "What is it?—Annie faithless, or the governor severe?—which?"

"Neither, my boy," rejoined his companion; "as for Annie Lambert, she is as she ever was, the paragon of lovely constancy and constant loveliness; and as for the governor, his assent to our marriage is as safe as quarter-day. You are on the right scent, however. Guess again."

"Impossible!' cried Bob, after a few moments' consideration, with his eyes intently fixed on the ceiling, as if a mesmeric influence was expected to come out of the whitewash.

"Guess!" repeated the puzzle-propounder with increased energy.

"Can't!" urged Bob, with redoubled emphasis, as he pushed the cigar-box towards him; "so take your time, light a principe, and unfold."

"Well, then, you remember your old sweetheart, Caroline Merton, and the bosom friend of Annie Lambert; she that you used to be so fond of when we did the amiable down at Grange Farm together?"

"Remember her? I should think so; why, in every thing, from "Pope Joan" to the "Lancers," she was the only partner I ever cared about; knitting or nutting, bonnet-building or blackberrying, Carry and I were inseparable. But, alas! Fate was unkind, and Caroline went over to Paris, when I went into the business from which I have just been liberated."

"Nothing of the kind, my dear fellow, all a delusion; she merely exercised her feminine prerogative and altered her mind. She has been in London ever since, keeping single, no doubt, for your sake. Annie saw her the other day; gave her an invitation to the farm, wrote to me to bring you down if I could, or bring myself if I couldn't, and to-morrow morning I propose starting."

"*We!*" emphasised Bob, "*we* propose starting, Dick; by all means make it the plural and bother Zimmerman! I see—the boy can look after the shop, and I can take the ramble with you. First Gravesend boat from Blackwall, then van to Maidstone, then walk to Grange through corn-fields and hop-gardens; hearty welcome from Farmer Lambert, blushing recognitions from Carry, moonlight strolls through the orchard, old loves, old memories, and all this sort of

thing; back to the cosy fireside, supper, brandy-and-water, jokes, songs, duetts, and all that sort of thing; then—hut, hang it, Dick, I'm fairly out of breath with my raptures already."

"Well, better that than out of temper, Boh, which I believe no one ever saw you yet. What the dence is your secret? I'd give the world—at least with Annie away from it—to be as unruffled by the petty annoyances of life as you are."

"A'l a hahit, my boy," responded Bob; "nothing ever worries me. I defy any vexation to wrinkle my complacent smoothness. I always take things easy."

Happy Chuckers! he had unconsciously dropped from his lips an oral pearl of philosophic value,—the alchymic secret that transmutes the dross of life to gold itself; hut he only thought of the meaning that dwelt upon the surface. He had taken every thing easy, very easy, up to the period at which this conversation above recorded took place; but how often does a pitfall await the footsteps of the unconscious traveller! how often, when gathering the last rose, do we feel the avenging thorn, when least expected!

And here, to snap short the train of similes into which moral reflections are always apt to lead us, we may as well leave Boh and his old friend to enjoy their converse privately and snugly together, whilst we seize the opportunity to say something about the ladies that formed the principal subject of discussion.

Annie Lambert, the daughter of a jolly Kentish farmer, was a little, langhing, Saxon, hlue-eyed beauty of about four-and-twenty; and Caroline Merton, who was her early playmate, and had been hrought up as a milliner in the adjoining town, was the intimate companion and confidential recipient of all her secrets. Dick Jones had the privilege of being invited to the Grange as a friend of the family, and on many of these occasions Chuckers had been prevailed upon to accompany him. During one of their more protracted sojourns at the farm, he became introduced to the fascinating architect of bonnets; and whether the influence of her eyes at once penetrated his heart, or whether the love-making that his friend Dick was carrying on pretty strongly at that time might he considered, with other dangerous disorders, infectious, it was soon observed that a very suspicious regard for each other's society

might lead, in due time, to a similar compact that was being talked about by another couple; and the discovery tended, of course, to make them the subjects of numerous sly hits and innendoes in consequence. The sudden manner in which Chuckers was withdrawn from these agreeable scenes into the busy realities of life prevented any explanation taking place; and though her image was never entirely effaced, it yet came to be occasionally eclipsed by the intervention of fresh objects, and it was only when he began to seriously think of settling down into matrimony that the permanence of the impression that had been made was felt and acknowledged.

Let us, therefore, now return to Bob, who, after revelling all night in a dream which blended long ringlets, bright eyes, green pathways, twisting hop-poles, and sentimental ballads, into a confused heap together, now awoke to the cold grey light that struggled through the curtains of his bed-chamber, and a matter-of-fact consciousness that the neighbouring church clock was then striking five. Every body knows—or if any body don't, it may soon be learned from experience—that getting up at five of a cold autumnal morning is not to be included among the social pleasures of this life. Every thing presents a repulsive, cheerless, damp aspect, from the shining slated roofs of the opposite houses to the slippery road only traversed by rumbling market-carts and rakish-looking cabs. Bob felt, certainly, rather reluctant to encounter the waking miseries of the hour, but remembering that he had to meet his friend at London Bridge by half-past seven, and recollecting the rich recompense that would reward his self-denial at the Grange, he battled manfully with the dosy suggestions of quiescent cosiness, and throwing himself vigorously out of bed, proceeded towards the window to ascertain the state of the weather.

It was decidedly no very agreeable prospect. A cold sleety rain, drenching to the skin those whose avocations compelled them to encounter it thus early, and sudden gusts, that wrenched umbrellas from hands that bore them, and sent wet avalanches of gingham into the faces of foot-passengers coming in an opposite direction, gave no promise of a very delightful day. "Never mind," thought Bob, "it will clear up presently;" and with this consolatory reflection he hastily robed himself, and began—for the boy who looked after that department never came till eight—to light the fire and prepare breakfast.

Now these operations are most assuredly easy enough in themselves, when the accessories are at hand, and no obstacle intervenes; but Bob's evil star was in the ascendant that morning, and he found difficulties where they were least expected. First, the wood was damp, and resisted all attempts at ignition; then the coals were as anti-inflammable as though they had been asbestos; and after these minor annoyances had been surmounted, and the little copper kettle had been consigned to the fiery ordeal, a puff of smoke indignantly refused to make its exit by the chimney, and diffused itself in a remonstrative shower of small blacks about the apartment. Driven down by the spasmodic gusts of an unquestionable north-easter, the smoke, emboldened by the success of the first onslaught, came out stronger than ever, and with a rebellious determination about it that set all opposition at defiance. It was in vain that Chuckers tried philosophic combinations with the door and window, opening and closing each alternately; the insidious invader of domestic peace would not be persuaded to beat a retreat, and Bob was compelled at last to endure the mortification of Ixion, and put up with a cloud instead of something more substantial. His breakfast was entirely spoiled, and his linen, previously suspended in spotless starched purity before the fire, was profusely ornamented with flakes of sooty blackness; but at last, after a fearful succession of struggles against the elementary enemies of fire, air, and water, Bob sallied forth, attired in the choicest apparel his wardrobe could provide, and heard the clock again, as he crossed the threshold, striking seven.

"In very good time, indeed," thought Bob, as he looked up and smiled approvingly on the slight fissure in the drifting vaporous clouds, and augured well of the streak of blue sky that appeared beyond; "we shall have a pleasant excursion down the river, after all;" but the rain, as if in direct opposition to his hopes, came down at that instant faster and steadier than ever, and compelled him to take refuge on a door-step whilst he established a telegraphic communication with a glazed hat and straw stockings, that, as the only extremities visible, indicated the existence of a cabman on the box of a vehicle opposite. A mutual understanding having been attained relative to the length of the journey and the corresponding amount of the fare, the waterman introduced Bob to the interior, and away they went.

On through the miry streets rolled the cab, dashing past dripping newsboys on their way home with the morning papers, and yawning apprentices detaching unwieldy shutters; away through St. Paul's Churchyard, with the wheels hissing round and round through the puddles, fizzing and sputtering like catherine wheels, and showering sparks of mud in all directions; away into Cheapside and Cornhill, and then with a sudden jolt, a jerk, and a crash, the cab came into collision with a railway omnibus, sending the horse down on its knees, the driver on to the pavement, and Bob into a state of mind that left considerable obscurity on the question where at that precise moment he might happen to be deposited.

Fortunately, after a moment's examination of the vehicle, no other injury was found to have accrued from the accident than a fracture of the shafts of the vehicle. This was, however, sufficient to preclude the possibility of Chuckers pursuing his journey by the same conveyance, and he therefore heroically determined to brave the weather, and walk the rest of the distance. There was a short cut he knew existing somewhere in that locality, which would bring him down to the river-side quicker than by pursuing the sinuosities of the ordinary thoroughfare; and threading the mazes of the first alley on the right which presented itself, he walked resolutely on, fully believing that he was going in the right direction. But the continuous chain of offices and warehouses branching off at right angles to each other, and inflicting the necessity of continually turning round the corner, mystified Bob so much that he got helplessly bewildered in his topography. Running rather than walking during the remainder of his exploring tour, Chuckers arrived at last at the London Bridge Wharf, almost breathless with his exertions, and nearly soaked through with the rain. Every thing and every body in the place appeared merged into a scene of inextricable hurry and confusion. Passengers bustling down the steps one way, and porters with pyramids of portmanteaus struggling off in another; periodical vendors, office keepers, coachmen, cab drivers, and country cousins, all talking at once, and moving confusedly to and fro; these and the other multifarious concomitants of a steam-

boat wharf on an autumnal morning completed the picture of chaos which now burst upon the astonnded vision of Mr. Chuckers.

"Half-past seven o'clock boat gone yet?" gasped Bob, as an official hurried by.

"No, sir; just starting; follow me, or you will be too late," and the panting querist had only just time to obey the injunctions of his guide and race over the slippery plank, off the stone steps, and on to the deck of the vessel, when the signal was given for departure, and the steamer was set in motion.

"Thank goodness!" muttered Bob, as he propped himself against the heated box of the funnel to dry his coat and rest his limbs; "thank goodness, I am all right now at last," and after having reconnoitred his fellow passengers during his stay in that position, and satisfied himself that Dick Jones was not of the number, he determined to wait at the Town Pier at Gravesend until that individual arrived, and then to administer a severe and dignified reprimand for the delay he had occasioned.

In the meantime, the clattering of knives and forks, plates and tea-cups, and the other concomitants of a matin meal, stole upon the ears of Mr. Chuckers with a pleasant sound, which served to tranquillise his perturbed spirit, and reminded him that a hearty breakfast on board would be no bad substitute for the scanty snack which the smoke had nearly deprived him of before starting.

Descending to the cabin, whence the savoury fumes of tea and coffee rose seductively to the upper air, Bob found the long table so prodigally provided with viands, which were so fully appreciated by the double rows of hungry passengers garnishing the extreme ends thereof, that he paused in admiration on the threshold, as one witnessing a scene that, to an observant and philanthropic mind like his, was truly delightful to contemplate. Rounds of beef and chines of ham, temptingly festooned with parsley and rapidly gliding away in transparent slices that dissolved almost by looking at, were enough of themselves to create an appetite; and he, having one ready made, lost no time in fixing himself in the midst.

Never before had Bob felt so ferociously hungry, and the innate good humour of his disposition displayed itself more freely than ever as the rolls and butter at his side disappeared with the inhibition of the fragrant mocha, like the magical articles dexterously made to vanish by the potent hand of a legerdemain professor. The weather, too, which had been so perversely gloomy all the morning, now began to realise Bob's sanguine prediction, and clear up in earnest, sending bright rays of sunshine through the cabin windows, and attracting grumbling passengers to the deck, who turned out all to have singularly enough prognosticated a fine day, though they had apparently so little faith in their vaticination as to have come prepared with every habiliment to encounter a wet one.

"What's to pay, steward?" asked Chuckers, as that bustling functionary came briskly round to collect the pecuniary amount of each individual's repast.

"Breakfast—eighteenpence, sir, if you please," was the smirking reply of the official, as he tucked his napkin under the arm, and rubbed his hands merrily together.

Bob thrust his hand confidently into his side pocket to discharge the claim, which, considering the havoc he had made, he confessed was extremely moderate, and the steward patiently awaited its withdrawal. It was a critical moment. Bob, baffled in the first attempt to extract money from one part of his vest, tried another, but with no better success. Then came more rapid, but less confidential, divings into every imaginable hole and corner of his apparel; and with every failure the face of Chuckers grew redder and redder, and that of the claimant longer and longer. At last the painful truth flashed upon him. His pocket had been picked during his exploring tour through the alleys by the river side, and his finances were reduced to the clinking of a few coppers that remained from the change of his last sixpence. Something sounding like a subdued anathema escaped from his lips on ascertaining the fact of such an embarrassing predicament.

"Sorry to hurry you, sir, but when you are *quite* disengaged—" vindictively urged the steward, brushing off imaginary crumbs from the table as a kind of excuse for loitering, and leaving his victim to fill up the hiatus.

Bob never felt the tones of the human voice grate so harshly on his ear. They seemed to vibrate on his tympanum like the closing chimes of the bell which warns the condemned criminal of his last moment.

It was of no avail that he assumed an air of confidence, and recommenced his researches. He felt that the precise reason of his non-compliance with the request must come out at last, and this, with as much assurance as he could command for the emergency, he now communicated to the anxious steward. But there are some men obstinately incredulous under such circumstances; and the proprietor of the consumed breakfast was one of them. He didn't believe in such things as pickpockets, not he; though they might dress themselves up like gentlemen, and walk about on steamers, for what he knew, and order things that they never intended to pay for; but he had only read of such doings in newspapers, and never saw one in his life that he knew of, though he didn't know how soon he might, and so on.

At last Bob, rendered desperate by circumstances, bethought himself of an expedient. He would deposit his silk umbrella with the steward as security for the ultimate payment; and this arrangement, after some hesitation, was accepted.

And now, cheered by the reflection that this dilemma had been favourably surmounted, Mr. Chuckers, whose faith in imperturbability of temper had already become somewhat shaken, began to brighten up with the sunbeams, and ascended to the deck to recover his lost equanimity. Another surprise was, however, in store for him. The steamer had made such rapid progress during the time he was breakfasting, and the period occupied by the unpleasant altercation that ensued, that it had now nearly got out of sight of land altogether; and the expanded view of the river, therefore, puzzled him mightily. It was something like seeing a well-known but unexpected vision in a dream, when the spectator, having gone off to sleep without feeling it, finds himself under the influence of imagination without believing it.

"What place is that yonder?" inquired the bewildered passenger, indicating an indefinite object, with a confused recollection of having seen it before, and anxiously awaiting a reply from the man at the helm.

"Buoy at the Nore, sir," bluntly replied the helmsman, wrenching up the lower part of the wheel as he spoke, and elevating his nose with a very small opinion of his interrogator's knowledge of geography.

"Buoy! Nore!" ejaculated Bob, with his eyes and mouth opening simultaneously; "why where on earth is this steamer going to?"

"Where should it be going to, but Margate, to be sure?"

Bob saw it all. The elaborate arrangement of the breakfast-table was explained. Another disaster had occurred. In his hurry to get on board at the wharf he had never thought of looking after the vessel's destination, and now he began to sink under the overwhelming pressure of such calamities. He grew morose and testy; out of humour with himself and all the world, with every particle of his milk of human kindness curdled and sour. He could have seen the steamer blown up with the utmost equanimity, and chuckled over the catastrophe as a fitting retribution.

Leaving his outer coat in custody with the collector as a temporary substitute for the payment of a seven shilling fare, Bob arrived, vexed and disconsolate, on the landing-place at Jarvis's jetty. For any especial benefit that he derived from being there deposited, he might as well have been perched on the summit of the Great Pyramid. Every body had assembled there to welcome every body they knew, but he had come unrecognised and unknown, and he felt dangerously tempted to seek a saline bath for his woes, and wedge himself permanently between the rocks and the seaweed. The thought came across him of the comfortable party that had doubtless assembled that hour at the Grange, and how Cairy Merton might be at that moment smiling on somebody else, and how his friend Dick Jones might be possibly assigning unpleasant reasons for his personal defalcation; and then as these phantoms of the brain taunted and troubled him, in mockery of his distress, a bold conception came to the rescue, and routed the others. It was only about five and thirty miles from Margate to Maidstone, and he would resolutely walk the distance. He set off at a furious pace with that determination.

At twelve o'clock that night the jovial party at the Grange was suddenly startled in the midst of a parting chorus by the apparition of a figure, disguised in dust, and disencumbered of superfluous apparel, which turned ont, upon investigation, to be Bob Chnckers. After clinging to the backs of stage coaches, and bribing railway stokers with a silk handkerchief and an "Albert cravat," to have a cast down the rail on an engine, he had succeeded in getting to his destination at last. Need we repeat the warm congratulations that ensued from Annie Lambert and Dick Jones on the safety of his arrival, and the expression of their sympathy with his misadventures throughout the day? Need we inform the reader how a certain young lady, who was said to have been taxing him with infidelity all the afternoon, now, amidst a perfect floricultural show of blushes, most earnestly denied it? Such, of course, would be the conclusion every intelligent reader would draw; and it would be perhaps equally uncalled for to state, in addition, how, on the subsequent marriage of Miss Annie Lambert with Mr. Richard Jones, the bride was given away by Bob Chuckers; and how, on the marriage of Bob Chuckers with Miss Caroline Merton, a similar service was performed by Mr. Richard Jones. More minute historians might make such assertions with some foundation, but we decline a diffusiveness so unnecessary. It will be sufficient to state that, from the eventful day on which the circnmstances above recorded took place, Bob Chuckers was never heard to boast of his being impervious to annoyances, and he confessed that though he had still a due regard for a healthful serenity of temper, yet that accidents might happen in the best regulated families, which would prevent a man "taking things easy."

When Thornton called, by special invitation, at the shop of his former fellow-lodger a few months afterwards, he found the cigar display had been superseded by a show of bonnets after the newest Parisian fashions, and on a farther introduction to the interior arrangements of his household, he was presented to a cheerful-looking little woman, who claimed the profits of that department as a portion of her matrimonial privileges, and who bore the name emblazoned on the shop front.

The house had been taken just before, on the sole responsibility of Mr. Chuckers; and though their domestic economy was of no very extensive description, every thing was going on in a smooth and comfortable manner, and Bob felt proud to announce that the duplicated business was in every way answering his expectations. There were two rooms above, which they let, as a slight help to the payment of the rent; and when Thornton last called there, he found the tenants consisted of Mr. Grigg, the ticket-writer, and Mr. Winkins, the comic singer, to whom, as the report went, Bob was very far from proving troublesome as an inexorable landlord.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BUBBLE BURST.

After a brief reign as managing director of the association he had succeeded in establishing, Mr. Parkins found that the affairs of the company were coming to a crisis, and that he should require all his artful manœuvring to escape from the consequences of his bubble exploding. Offices had been taken, with a large brass plate npon them, dazzling the eyes of passers-by; and a paraphernalia of models, maps, scientific testimonials, and sectional diagrams, had all assisted to procure at the outset a supply of available victims. But the constant promise, so often repeated, of prodncing, for the satisfaction of the shareholders, the wonderfnl aerial conveyance itself, could not be expected to pnt off the evil day much longer. Already were the shareholders, who had paid their deposits, clamorous for a further knowledge of the invention; and though an experimental trip was hinted at as in process of arrangement, and a day was even specified when it should take place, donbts were fast arising, and opinions widely disseminated, that the proposed revolntion to be effected in the means of transit would result in a tremendons failure.

One morning Mr. Parkins and his confederate Luke Sharp were discussing the future prospects of the company, and the best mode of bringing their scheme to a profitable climax, when the boy Dick thrust himself deferentially in at the doorway, and signified that he had got a communication of importance for the private ear of the ex-attorney.

"Now then, Dick, what is it?" cried Parkins, as Sharp took up the newspaper and went into the obscurity of an inner room, where his head was noticed at intervals to rise inquisitively upwards above the curtains of the glass door; "what's the news, my man?—any fresh discovery, eh?"

"Mr. Greene has sent yon this note," answered the tiger, "and has given me my discharge."

"Oh, he has, has he?" observed the other, taking the missive up carelessly, and tearing open the envelope. "Let us see what he has got to say for himself as an excuse for stopping away so long." And fixing his attention on the enclosure, he began to make

himself acquainted with the contents; his vexation, as he did so, betraying itself in an instantaneous clouding of his visage, and a wrinkled restlessness about his mouth, that showed how deeply the tenor of the letter annoyed him.

"So, so," muttered Parkins, as he finished its perusal and inwardly cursed the writer, "a complete withdrawal from our company, eh? and the demand of an acknowledgment of his irresponsibility in its formation, under threat of an immediate exposure. Vastly well, upon my word."

He again turned over the letter to see that he had not lost a syllable of its contents, and then crumpling it up into his pocket with a contemptuous sneer, he called the boy towards him, and looking at him with a searching glance of inquiry, he exclaimed:

"Here is another half-crown for you, Dick; and now tell me, have you observed any thing more relative to the movements of your late master, that you think I ought to know?"

"About the strange lady that he was always meeting, sir, do you mean?" asked the boy.

"Ay, or any body else that he met," pursued Parkins; "who is she? where does he go to, eh?"

"The finding out who she was," replied Dick, looking knowingly at his employer, "cost me a good deal of trouble, I assure you, sir. She arn't no ordinary person."

And so, I suppose, the information must be paid for accordingly," smiled Parkins, sympathising with the implied condition, and appreciating the existence of a roguery that was so kindred to his own; "well, tell me every thing you know, Dick, and you shall have no reason to complain of my liberality. But remember," he added, assuming a sterner look and tone, "that as it was for the especial purpose of tracking him where he went, and acting as a spy upon his proceedings, that I got you into his service, so if I find you have been neglecting your duty, and now attempt to screen yourself by falsehoods, I will break every bone in your tiger-skin."

"You must know, sir, then," returned the boy after an assurance of his strict veracity, "that I have kept a close watch upon Mr. Greene for the last fortnight, and during that time I have found that the lady whom he was meeting on these occasions, and which, as I before hinted to you, were pretty frequent, has now turned out to be a lady of title."

"Ha!" cried Parkins, "what is her name? come, my good lad, I must know all. Who is it that he has been carrying on this intrigue with so slily?"

"Lady Adeliue Temple," responded the boy, "and she lives in Portman Square. I noted both her name and the address down at the time, so that I should make no mistake in telling you. Notwithstanding all the precautions they took to keep the matter secret, and the deep veil the lady wore when she used to meet him, I found her out at last by following her to the house where she resided, and inquiring all about her from the footman that often went to have his glass at a tavern in the neighbourhood. It seems that there was to have been a match between her ladyship and the Earl of Winterton, but Mr. Fitzroy Greene has managed, I suppose, to get her to himself."

"And how recently have you noticed these assignations?" inquired Parkins, reflectively considering what he had heard.

"No longer ago than last night, sir," was the rejoinder; "I believe Mr. Greene had some idea of the way in which he was observed; for, on waiting upon him at breakfast this morning, he looked very uneasy, and, as he gave me this letter to bring to you, he paid me my wages, and told me that he should not want me any more."

"Well, Dick, you shall be no sufferer on my account," remarked Parkins, "and if you like to come again into my service, I will try and make an opening for you. You can call at the office here about the same time to-morrow, and, for the present, here is another——. No," he added, correcting himself and buttoning up his pocket; "on second thoughts it will be safer for you in my keeping, and I will consider it in your wages."

"Thankye, sir," acknowledged Dick, somewhat disconcerted by this retraction of his expected gratuity; "I will call here then to-morrow, sir. Is there any note I shall take back to Mr. Green?"

"No; there is no answer required," rejoined the other abruptly, but adding immediately afterwards, "stay, tell him that I will call and see him myself upon the subject this very afternoon."

The boy nodded his head in token of his comprehending the message he had to deliver, and then disappeared, and at the same time Parkins waved his hand as a signal for his friend, Lnke Sharp, to come from his concealment, and flung himself back in an arm chair to sustain in an easy position the weight of the thoughts that oppressed him.

"Sure there are no suspicious-looking people waiting outside?" cautiously inquired Mr. Sharp, as he emerged into notice; "I fancy I can see an objectionable hat that is lurking round the corner. Ever since that confounded fellow who recognised me came into the place, I have been in constant apprehension of a service;" and flattening himself along the wall by the window, so as to secure the most extensive range of vision, he craned his neck inquisitively in the dreaded direction.

"Plague take the bailiffs and you together!" remarked Parkins petulantly; "as if I had not just now enough to do to think of myself, you must keep on worrying me about your confounded difficulties. Every knock at the door sends you into the back room as quickly as if it was a congreve rocket, and a fellow who loiters outside for two minutes makes you keep bobbing your head up and down behind the window-curtain like a jack-in-the-box. Hang the bailiffs!"

"With all my heart," reciprocated the other, turning aside from his critical survey, as soon as he found his suspicions were groundless, "hang the bailiffs by all means, but you were wrong to couple us together. However, what is the state of affairs now?"

"Greene has sent in his resignation, and means to wash his hands of the whole affair altogether," answered Parkins moodily.

"Ah, I always entertained some suspicion of his being reluctant to go on with the scheme, but that of course will not affect the stability of the concern," continued the adventurer, folding his arms on the high stool opposite, and leaning forward so as to bring it into a convenient tilt.

"Look here, Sharp," cried Parkins, starting up and apparently deciding on a course of action of which he had been considering the propriety; "it is evident that we cannot go on much longer in this way. No more money is coming in, the original shareholders are getting troublesome, and as the affairs of the company must be wound up at some time not far distant, it is my impression that the best thing we can do will be to close our accounts this day, and leave the rest to fight it out among themselves."

"Very good," assented the other, "but if the machine itself is the great difficulty, why not inflate the body of it with hydrogen gas, as we did the model, and have recourse to the same means to keep the deception from being detected?"

"It would be of no use," negatived Parkins; "there is a strong rumour spread abroad now that we have been deluding the public all along, and that would be only making matters worse. Besides, the funds are getting low, and it was from Greene I expected to recruit them."

"Then if the company is at this hour to be considered defunct," said Mr. Luke Sharp, "let us pay due respect to its memory by celebrating its obsequies as we inaugurated its birth, with a good dinner. I am at the present moment in need of some refreshment to restore my peace of mind, for I consider a man with a dissatisfied interior is at war with all the world."

"You may yourself conduct the ceremony after that or any other fashion you will," returned Parkins, taking up his hat and filling his pockets with those papers from the desk that he thought worthy of preservation; "but you must dine alone, for I have other business to attend to that will occupy me the remainder of the day."

"And for the financial department?" suggested Sharp.

"There is a five-pound note, which you can employ as your inclination prompts. To-morrow, if you will call upon me at my villa, I will see what further sum can be given. The clerk we have hired can sell the fittings-up, and pay himself; and I will leave him a note to that effect, so that he may get it when he returns from dinner;" and writing a few lines, he enclosed them in an envelope, and placed it in a conspicuous position on the empty desk.

"Well, now I think the coast is clear, and I may venture," soliloquised Mr. Sharp, who, whilst the managing director was thus occupied, had been anxiously reconnoitring the pavement from the window; "so, if the case is indeed hopeless, and the future yields no prospect of living upon shares, I will at once quit this cemetery of departed promises, and forget my disappointment in the consoling atmosphere of a tavern;" and buttoning his coat up to the throat with an air of tranquil resignation, he apostrophised the doomed furniture of the office in a strain of pathetic regret, and, bidding a temporary farewell to the late director, he glided through the green baize portal, and vanished.

Parkins had no sooner been relieved of his presence, than, taking the key off the hook where it hung, he locked the outer door, called up the housekeeper, who inhabited some dreary kitchen below, and giving the key into her hands, with a strict injunction to her that it should be delivered to the clerk as soon as he returned, he passed out into the street, and, calling a cab, drove off at once to the residence of Mr. Fitzroy Greene.

With the knowledge that he held that individual's bond for sixty thousand pounds, he had no doubt of bringing him to some favourable arrangement for its restoration, or failing that, he had resolved upon immediately availing himself of the power of arrest. From the intelligence he had that morning received respecting the intrigue in which he was engaged, he surmised that Greene, momentarily anticipating an exposure of the fraud that had been practised, was striving to strengthen his position by forming, under false pretences, an alliance with a lady of fortune; and, though such an announcement had been altogether unexpected, he yet rejoiced at it as being likely to assist him in gaining his object. With these thoughts passing through his mind, he contentedly reviewed the prospect he had of keeping himself secure, and yet considerably enlarging his resources, when the vehicle stopped at the house, and he saw the tiger lingering on the door-step in a condition of palpable perplexity.

From the statement of Dick he learned that Mr. Fitzroy Greene had about an hour previously taken his departure, and that the companion of his flight was the lady with whom he had been seen engaged in different parts of the town for some weeks before. It was then discovered that an elopement had taken place, and from further inquiries that had been instituted by Lord Walsingham, who had called there also to obtain some information of the track of his missing relative, it was ascertained besides that post-horses had been ordered in readiness that morning at an early hour, and that the fugitives had fled to the continent until the consent to the marriage had been obtained by the lady from her family, and their return could take place without molestation.

Doubly enraged by his plan being thus thwarted, Parkins quitted the house; and with a savage growl at Dick, and a similar burst of indignation at the ill fortune that seemed to attend him, he turned aside into the main road with the intention of pursuing his way homeward. That Greene, on whom he had relied as being so deeply interwoven in his toils, should escape from them in a way that had never been considered possible till now—that he should elude the subtle contrivances by which he had hoped to have him entirely at his mercy—was a blow that he was quite unprepared for. But on his arrival at the villa at Brixton fresh embarrassments were disclosed, and he saw that the fortune he had devoted his life to build up was now crumbling down about his head, and threatening to overwhelm him in its destruction.

A pile of letters were there awaiting him; and as he took up one after another, to ascertain their contents, his rage and disappointment increased. Many were from shareholders in the company, who demanded another meeting for the purpose of hearing the promised report of the engineer; others were on unpleasant business connected with different societies that he had got some connection with; but there were two letters, conveying more important and disastrous tidings than the rest, which convinced him that the impending danger was indeed more imminent than he had contemplated, and too great to be averted by any artifice, or to be met by any bold assurance.

The first of these missives that disclosed the depth of the precipice that yawned before him was from the Manchester solicitor, Mr. Jefferson, who had been the active agent in the affair of the disputed estate, and who now wrote to say that having ascertained the imposition that had been practised, he was prepared to recover the whole amount that had been paid on the faith of those documents being genuine; and unless the fullest and most satisfactory details could be given, exculpating Parkins from having knowingly mixed himself up in the transaction, he threatened to indict the whole party for fraudulent representations. The other was of a still more dangerous tendency. It purported to be from the savings-bank of which Parkins had a few years before got himself appointed actuary, and it alleged that certain defalcations having been that day discovered, and the money having been traced to have passed through his hands, an inquiry

would be officially instituted on the following morning during a meeting at which he was required to attend, and where he was expected to give an account of the manner in which the missing sums had been appropriated.

This amount, which he had subtracted for his own use at a time when he required the employment of it for some special purpose, he had constantly intended to have replaced before the deficit was detected; but now the critical period had arrived, he knew that it was beyond his power. Ruin, complete and inevitable ruin, thus menaced him on every side, and the horror of being exposed, the idea of having to undergo a trial, and the fear of being punished for his iniquities, contributed to heighten the appalling terrors of his situation. That night he might rest perhaps in peace, but the morning would dawn upon him a man without a hope, without a home, without a character. The great purpose to which he had dedicated an existence of intrigue, chicanery, and falsehood, was now baffled by the recoil of all his scheming on himself, and the utmost application which he bestowed upon the subject failed to show him one loophole by which he could escape from the perils that surrounded him, one clue by which he could extricate himself from his embarrassments.

Once or twice the thought of suicide occurred to him, for he dreaded the ordeal through which, in another twelve hours, he would have to pass, and he felt that his courage was not equal to the task of brazening out his guilt. Then he hesitated at the idea of making away with himself, as he reflected on the extreme torments he might have to undergo in case he failed in his attempt, and how he might linger for days in his agony, the bodily pain being augmented by the mental sufferings. Besides, he who had never thought of death, he who now felt himself so unfit to die, trembled at the risk of that Future to which he was about to appeal. With his mind almost maddened by the conflicting impulses that rose within him, his brain heated with the ideas that presented themselves relative to the utter destruction of his reputation, he rose from his seat, pressed his hand madly against his heated brow, and paced furiously up and down the apartment to allay the excitement that was raging in his breast.

It was now dusk, and he rang for candles, passing out of the room as he did so to his apartment up stairs, so that his servant might not see the change in his countenance, that he felt was visible. His wife, from whom perhaps he would have gladly escaped on any condition, as he dreaded the impetuous outbreak of her violent temper when she came to learn the failure of all his projects, had gone that day to town; and it was a relief that he appreciated, to be spared the additional annoyance of her presence.

Having thus no other person in the house but himself, with the exception of the servant, he knew, if he could nerve himself for the suicidal act he contemplated, that he should be able to accomplish it without interruption; but still he shrank from its commission. He opened the drawers in his bedroom, looked at some old papers that were contained therein, and then re-closed them without removing one. He drew aside the curtain of the window, gazed down into the road, and followed with apparent interest a passing omnibus, till it had rolled on beyond his sight. Then, equally indifferent and motiveless in his actions, he flung open the window, and listlessly watched the passengers wandering whither they might be bound, and the nature of the business that called them forth. But the cool air that poured in failed to assuage the sultry heat that seemed to glow around his face like the blast of a heated furnace; and he flung down the casement after a long and vacant stare on the passing throng, and started from his reverie like one who has been haunted by a dream.

Dashing his hand into the cold water, and laving the hot brow, the heat of which appeared to become momentarily more intense as he pondered on the perils of his position, he strove to quench the feverish burning that was within; but the temporary coolness that was imparted speedily became followed by more acute sufferings, and even the temperature of the water he had used was perceptibly increased after the ablution. He felt a fire consuming him; his blood seemed to be molten lava, sluggishly throbbing through his veins; his pulse exhibited a rapid movement, whose beats might have been counted a hundred to the minute, and yet still the fatal consequences of the morrow were more vividly arrayed before his eyes than if he had remained cool and collected. His hand, that had before involuntarily traversed the surface of his toilet-table, now again sought for something in the same direction, and fastened itself upon a small parcel that was there deposited.

It was a case of pocket-pistols, that he remembered to have bought the preceding day, for no especial object that he knew of, but they had tempted his eye as they glittered in the shop window, and, with a childish fancy, he had become their purchaser. They were loaded too, for he had asked the shopman to perform that office for him, so that he might test their power at a shooting-gallery close by, the proprietor of which he knew. Other things had occupied his attention soon afterwards, and diverted him from his original purpose; but there were the pistols ready for use; and the whim that had seized him to buy the instruments thus appeared to have arisen, as it were, from a presentiment that he might shortly have to require their aid. He had never closely examined them since they had been bought; and now the thought occurred to him that he would take them down to the parlour and scrutinise their workmanship. As quickly as the suggestion presented itself he put it into practice, and descending with the case, he returned to the room where he had been before seated, and which had, during his absence, received additional illumination from a couple of candles placed upon the centre table.

The curtains were drawn in folds over the window, so as to exclude all observation from without; a profound silence reigned unbroken throughout the house. It was but the snapping of one of these pistols, and he possessed the power of freeing himself from his accusers. He had a choice of two modes of action, and he must imperatively adopt one course or the other. On the one side was certain exposure, ruin, and punishment, the ignominy of which was more painful to him than its severity; on the other was death, a sure release from all that he feared in this world; and of that which was to follow, the deep mystery had yet to be fathomed. He would risk the unknown to escape the known fate that awaited him, and accept the more effectual, though in reality the more terrible, alternative. With his nerves strung to the performance of the dreadful deed he contemplated, his face pale as ashes, and lips rigidly compressed, he drew his chair opposite the looking-glass, and, with a pistol in each hand, planted the cold orifice of each tube against his temples.

But his courage failed him, and his arms dropped palsied down as he was on the point of giving the final impetus to the triggers that would have stretched him lifeless with the slightest movement of the forefinger. He felt that he had not sufficient firmness.

He laid aside the fatal implements for a moment, and crossed the room towards the cellaret that was beneath the sideboard, resolved upon stimulating or stupefying his senses with a draught of brandy, and thus remove or deaden the timidity that he felt. The decanter was, however, empty; but fixed upon the accomplishment of his purpose, he rang the bell, assumed a transitory air of gaiety, and dispatched the servant to a tavern in the neighbourhood to obtain a fresh supply.

Whilst she was gone his agitation suffered no abatement. He nervously walked up and down the room, thinking over the events of his past life, and, now that it was too late to recall them, ardently wishing that he had time yet left for repentance and reformation. It was some distance to the public-house whither the servant had gone, and oppressed with a sudden and painful conviction of his loneliness, he threw open the street-door, and there determined to wait for her return.

Next to his own house, and adjoining it, with only the garden railings between, there was a surgeon residing, whose red lamp cast a lurid glare down the pathway. As he stood looking at the surgery, that projected slightly from the private dwelling, he thought how, in the narrow interval that was lessening every minute, this man would be called in to witness his dying throes, and pronounce the hopelessness of his recovery, and he felt a strange pleasure in the reflection that, by so simple an action, he could defy the craft of the surgeon; that he who had so often boasted of his skill could be baffled in his cunning and thwarted in his efforts to restore life by one who was on the eve of adopting every precaution to destroy it. And then he fancied the circumstances that would succeed; and rapidly as the events pictured in a dream, he dwelt upon the successive details of the incident, and with a sort of fiendish joy delighted to fix them in his mind. The alarm of the servant, the crowding up before the door of the passengers who might be passing at the time, the bustling attendance of the surgeon himself, the futility of his assistance, the coroner's inquest and the verdict, the opinions of those that knew him, and the paragraph that would appear in the newspapers recording his suicide, all went quickly in succession through his mind. During the first few moments after he had thus taken up his position, he mentally pursued the panoramic series of occurrences that was to follow his self-destruction with as much eagerness and minuteness as if he had intended to be a witness of them all.

A fresh incident disturbed his curious reflections and gave rise to a new train of events.

A passenger was seen hurriedly crossing the road and coming hastily up the narrow pathway in his foregarden; he reeled towards the door where Parkins stood, and then finding his error in having mistaken that house for the surgery, he faintly indicated that he sought medical assistance, and, before he could utter another word, dropped lifeless in the passage.

Impelled by a feeling of humanity, as well as actuated by a desire to save the life of a fellow-creature as some atonement for afterwards sacrificing his own, Parkins drew the inanimate form into the parlour, and then saw that a fit of apoplexy had been the cause of this strange visitation.

As he looked at those flushed features, the swollen veins in which were visibly enlarged under the integuments, and with the foam oozing from the mouth streaked with blood, denoting the suddenness, as well as the fatal nature, of the attack, Parkins saw that life had indeed departed, and that death, apparently instantaneous, had arisen from congestion of the brain. As his observation was further attracted to the form of the stranger, he noticed that there was a similarity of dress and figure between them, and he then rapidly conceived an idea which he lost not a moment in putting into execution. Might he not avail himself of this accident to yet preserve his life and evade the consequences of his imperilled reputation? There was no leisure for considering; the attempt must be made at once or never, and he resolved to convert the incident to his immediate advantage.

Having returned and closed the outer door, he eagerly examined the contents of the deceased's pockets, which he found to consist chiefly of letters and memoranda, that supplied the intelligence of his name and occupation. From these it was shown that he was a native of the north of England, only sojourning for a brief time in the metropolis, and that he was a complete stranger within its limits. This discovery materially assisted the design he had in contemplation. The money that he found, and which amounted to only a small sum, he left untouched; but removing the papers and a watch, that might help to identify him, he substituted his own in their stead. His next proceeding was to exchange coats, for the rest of the apparel was too much like his own to attract notice under the circumstances; and having effected this, not without difficulty, and also not without repugnance, he stooped down, and with one resolute effort discharged the pistols so closely against the face of the dead man, that the features were completely disfigured, and identification of them was impossible. Placing the pistols on the floor, in such a position that they might have been dropped by the supposed suicide, he took a hasty glance at the corpse, to assure himself that the deception was perfect, and that he had left no clue to guide observers to the real fact of the case; and then rushing to his drawers, he secured about his person all the ready money that there was in the house, comprising several hundred pounds. This done, he took the hat and stick of his unfortunate visitor, leaving his own in their place, and passing down to the end of the garden, carefully closing the door and gate after him, he emerged upon a narrow lane at the back, and by a circuitous route gained the high road, where, taking a return vehicle, he caused himself to be driven to the northern suburbs, believing that in that direction he could safely go without being recognised. There was a coffee-house near the railway, where he got a bed for the night, and the next morning he started by the earliest train for Liverpool, took a passage in a steamer that was leaving the port the same day, and three weeks after his flight from England he was strolling carelessly down the Broadway in New York, rejoicing at the ingenuity with which he had escaped detection. In a few days afterwards he read an account of his own death in the newspapers, with all the circumstances attending it, and perused a full statement of the causes which were supposed to have led to the commission of the rash act, with various hints about the penal retribution with which he would have been visited had he lived to have undergone the trial that would have established the extent of his iniquities.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OF GREAT THINGS AND SMALL.

PENDENT behind his master's cab, Dick had made many rapid and fleeting reflections on human life, and he now began to seriously think of turning some of them to account. The sudden change in his prospects had therefore not tended so much to his surprise as to his inconvenience, and he commenced wondering what he should next become, as well as speculating on what he should like to be. The sum he had received for his wages, and which had been paid a month in advance, in lieu of the notice for the same time, was, however, amply sufficient to make the future employment he might get a matter of present indifference; and with this in his pocket he wended his way homeward, putting his money in jeopardy by occasional excursive flights over the posts along the pavement, and bearing up manfully against the ironical cry of "Buttons," that emanated from envious errand-boys who had not been raised to the same dignity as himself.

Naturally kind at heart as he was quick in perception, and more injured by the roguery into which he had been precociously inducted than by any innate badness of disposition, he did not think of crossing the threshold of his abode without expending a portion of his earnings on such little presents as he considered would be most acceptable to his maternal parent, who presided over the revolutions of a mangle down a small court in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane. For this purpose he accumulated as he went along a complete miscellany of articles presumed to be wanted for domestic economy, and for purchasing which he anticipated a superabundance of acknowledgments. Indeed, though not deficient in variety, it must be admitted that his liberality rather than his taste seemed to have guided his choice in their selection.

Thus he had bought curious packages of tea done up in odd little green paper packets, covered over with hieroglyphics that looked like the alphabet macadamised, and having bits of red silk coming out at the top, as if the Chinese considered such ornaments highly improving to the flavour. Then, with these, he had linked a supply of coffee and brown rappee,

tied up both together, and so much resembling each other, that the sight would fail to distinguish the difference, so that a decoction of snuff would not be unlikely to take the place of the mocha at the breakfast table, as in the innocence of his marketing he had obtained equal quantities of both. A dozen lucifer boxes of divers strange and ingenious patterns, a quantity of sweetmeats of every possible colour and imaginable shape, together with a sugar Harlequin, smeared over with Dutch metal, and whose head had nearly melted away with reckless exposure to the sun, were not among the least valued of his collection; and, in addition, he had procured from the proprietor of a peripatetic print-shop, who displayed his goods within the vortex of an inverted umbrella, sundry flaming coloured portraits of distinguished personages, which would have been more strongly accredited as striking likenesses had they not all possessed an embarrassing family resemblance.

These latter were intended by him to decorate the walls of his humble domicile; and with the entire budget thus marshalled under his arm, Dick made his appearance at the door of his mother's abode. But what was his astonishment when he found that venerable lady decked out in her best Sunday attire, the operations of the mangle suspended, and a gentleman of benign aspect and broad spectacles sitting quite at his ease on the crazy chair, and talking away as confidentially to his parent as if they had known each other for the last half century, at whichever year, according to the most approved chronological computation, it may be supposed to begin.

Directly he entered, the benign gentleman rose from his seat; and hearing, by the exclamation of his mother, that Dick was the boy they were waiting for, he seized him warmly by the hand, and, bidding him not be alarmed—which injunction of course made him turn dreadfully pale directly—he proceeded to ask him a number of questions, all in the most pleasant and agreeable manner, and then expressed himself gratified in the highest degree with the replies they elicited.

The speaker declared himself to be Mr. Jefferson, a solicitor from the provinces, and it appeared from the friendly catechism that took place between them, that he had acquired, through Dick, some very important documents which materially affected the business that had brought him to town. It will be remembered, when the boy was left in temporary charge of the chambers in Lyon's Inn, he had pulled down a pile of dusty papers that had been left there upon a high shelf by Parkins when he first came, and which were afterwards forgotten. These he had taken possession of as a sort of treasure trove, intending to apply them by instalments to the ignoble purpose of kindling the domestic fire. A temporary shortness of the household exchequer had compelled the old lady to look up, one morning, all the stray articles that could be converted into immediate cash, and, amongst the number, these very documents were considered, from their weight, to be advantageously saleable as waste paper, and they were consigned to a neighbouring cheesemonger for that purpose. It so happened that a lawyer's clerk, in making a small purchase at this shop for his family, had received it wrapped up in a portion of the papers, and, finding it purported to be the copy of a will of an ancient date, he took it, as a curiosity, to the office next morning, and showed it to his employer. The party thus called upon to criticise the writing happened to be the London corresponding agent of Mr. Jefferson; and satisfied, from the first inspection, that it bore some reference to the disputed Greeno estate, he forwarded it to Manchester, where it was at once identified as being a part of the missing papers of which they had been so long in search. Accordingly, Jefferson posted up to town directly by express, called upon the firm, was referred to the clerk, who directed him to the cheesemonger, and here he fortunately discovered that no other fragment had been parted with, and for a trifling consideration he managed to recover the entire bundle. Subsequent investigations led him to the source whence the papers had been originally obtained, and from the inquiries he instituted, with a view to gain the fullest information, he found that Dick was the medium of their being restored; so, hearing that his return was expected every moment, he had awaited his arrival to elicit further particulars connected with the object of his research.

It was not, however, much light that the tiger could throw upon the matter, beyond communicating the fact that they had been got in the manner described. But the shrewd vigilance of Jefferson, who now felt that he had got at last on the right tack, enabled him, from this recital, to account for the ingenuity with which Parkins, whom he had suspected all along, had falsified the wills and claims that he had put forth; and he now determined to investigate the affair fully.

Giving Dick a handsome gratuity for what assistance he had received, and promising more permanent benefits should arise from the service he had so unconsciously rendered to the persons interested in the discovery of this real claimant, Mr. Jefferson left them to enjoy the result of their good luck; and, assisted by his partner in the case, he was indefatigable in his exertions to trace the deception that had been practised, and the right person who was entitled to the property. The supposed suicide of Parkins of course baffled his inquiries in that quarter, though it confirmed the belief he had entertained concerning him; but of Hawkins, with whom he had been connected, no tidings could be gained. The advertisement that he had caused to be inserted in the morning journals had brought him no further intelligence, and he was almost despairing of unravelling the intricacies of the case more than he had yet done, when one forenoon, as he was sitting in the office, pondering on what further proceedings he should take, the clerk brought to him in the inner room a message that there was a person without who desired to see him on the subject of the advertisement.

Too familiar with the number of disappointments he had already sustained to be much elated with the announcement, he carelessly gave orders for his admission, and tranquilly awaited his approach.

The man who entered was a thick-set, burly personage, beyond the middle age, and plainly though neatly attired. Having ascertained that the advertisement for "the next of kin to John or Alfred Howard" had emanated from that office, he stated that he could furnish, he believed, some important evidence in connection with one of that name, and that as he required no remuneration for having voluntarily come forward, he should stipulate in return that his communication should be received in confidence, and that he should be held exempt from any consequences to himself that might arise from the disclosure.

This having been promised, a startling narrative of the singular persecution to which the lost heir had been subjected was detailed to the eager ears of the

expectant listener. From this, Jefferson gathered the information he had so ardently desired, and he now possessed the fullest knowledge of the very circumstances that he had previously deemed involved in inscrutable mystery. The link of partnership that subsisted between Hawkins and Parkins, as conveyancers, sixteen years before; the client John Howard, who had entrusted his claims to their management, and of which they had contrived to take such a fraudulent advantage; the existence of his son, Alfred Howard, the real inheritor, and the means which Hawkins had employed to keep from him a knowledge of the funds that he was receiving in the other's name and appropriating to his own use, were all related to him with the circumstantial adjuncts that left no doubt upon their correctness. Of the way in which the life of young Howard had been attempted the narrator spoke at length, and even described the hovel where his temporary imprisonment had taken place, and of the fate that there befell the old miser; but of the ulterior fortunes of Howard he could give no intimation further than that he had escaped the designs of his supposed uncle, and, as the speaker imagined, had gone again to sea, where his early days had been chiefly passed.

After some further conversation had taken place between them, it was arranged that the communicative informant, who has been doubtless recognised long before this as Randall, should again call in the course of the following week, and that in the meantime every exertion should be made to obtain a clue to the place where Alfred Howard might be found.

Leaving, therefore, the lawyers to busily arrange the necessary proceedings preliminary to the restitution of the estate to the right claimant, who had been so singularly found at last, we must now turn to Thornton, who, long before the association was broken up, had parted from Fitzroy Greene, as there was no further occasion for his services, and had got some precarious employment as a transcriber for a bookseller, to whom he had been recommended by his late employer.

Before, however, we advert to the nature of his avocation, and the incident resulting from it, let us say a few words about the place where it was carried on.

At the back of that noble mass of buildings in Great Russell Street, where the fine stone portico of the British Museum has thrust aside the old walls of Montague House, there is a narrow entrance through a gateway leading to that portion of the northern wing appropriated to the library. Passing through a hall devoted to the reception of the coats, cloaks, and umbrellas, belonging to the readers, we ascend a stone staircase, pause before a door at the end of the first flight, and enter that lofty range of apartments known as the reading rooms of the British Museum.

Directly the visitor enters he is impressed with the solemn silence that prevails, so singularly contrastive with the noise of the bustling thoroughfare he has just quitted. There is a quiet air of studious gravity exhibited among the readers, that suggests the idea of monastic seclusion. A subdued tone is imparted to a cough, and what little conversation there may be is carried on in a whisper, whilst the attendants, in distributing the books that have been written for, flit noiselessly about like shadows. At the tables, where the implements of writing are plentifully provided, will be noticed venerable antiquaries bending over portly folios; transcribers carefully puzzling out cramped and faded manuscripts; historians compiling curious information from old tracts in black letter; novelists gathering from antique prints their authorities for costume and local descriptions; and loungers of all kinds engaged in the perusal of such literature as best may harmonise with their tastes and inclinations.

At various intervals will be found mingling with the group some literary ladies, chiefly occupied on works of botany and conchology; and as one of the features of the age, showing that woman, equally with man, is admitted to the sphere of literary occupation, and with him shares its toils, their presence is not without giving rise to some gratifying reflections.

Many of the readers frequent the library more, perhaps, from the influence of long habit than from any ostensible purpose connected with their pursuits, and many have gone there daily, reading on for years until the hair turned grey and the eyes waxed dim, though the mind remained as keen and vigorous as ever.

They may be noticed of a morning making their appearance as soon as the stoves are lit, and as the visitors come dropping in, one by one, throughout the day, looking with a melancholy interest around, as the vacancies in the accustomed seats, or the substitution of fresh faces indicate the absence of their old companions, and the gradual snapping of other links in the familiar chain of social intercourse. The consciousness of the frail tenure by which human life is held, and the possibility of our own place being one of the next vacancies, is always forcibly recalled to mind by a similar change in any large assemblage of persons; but nowhere does the feeling assume a more impressive influence than here, where the congeniality of employment first established an intimacy, and the book that has outlived its reader constantly reminds us of its cessation.

One afternoon Thornton was leaving the reading-room, thinking of the imperishable legacies that had been there left by the great master-minds of the country, and wondering whether he could ever hope to increase his own resources by adventuring on literary pursuits, when, to his surprise, he encountered outside the spruce figure of Caleb Crummins, the old clerk in the city, who had been the means of obtaining for him a situation on his first arrival in London.

A friendly interchange of greetings, inquiries, and explanations followed this unexpected interview, which was an agreeable one to both parties, and then the clerk mentioned that having left his place of business an hour earlier than usual, he was waiting to see a fellow-lodger of his, who was an attendant in the Museum, and who had persuaded him to call there preparatory to starting on an evening stroll to one of the suburbs—a brief excursion, for which the company of Thornton was now earnestly requested.

The appearance of Mr. Bookers, the fellow-lodger referred to, and who was a quiet venerable-looking old gentleman, in a sober suit of brown, with a staid visage, rendered more sedate by the addition of a pair of spectacles, led to an introduction between them, and the proposal of a third being added to the party was most cordially responded to and welcomed by the assistant librarian.

Accordingly, they set off for a pedestrian stroll, and about an hour afterwards the trio were seated in one of the snug hostels about the heights of Hampstead, each enjoying the change of scene, and congratulating themselves on a recreation so beneficial and inexpensive being within their reach. Even Mr. Crummins, whose proverbial dislike to any thing away from his

usual city haunts had led him at first to undervalue the freshening air and the wholesome appetite for tea which it engendered, now began to relax his prejudices, and confess that a rural trip might, after all, be rendered pleasant enough in such companionship.

Coming back, they crossed Highgate Archway, and stopped to gaze from the parapet of that lofty structure on the densely-crowded mass of buildings that stretched away beneath them. Reaching to the very verge of the horizon, and only limited by the dusky cloud of smoke sent up from the tall clusters of chimneys, the vast metropolis was seen looming through the haze of twilight, the loftier spires just tinged with the reflection of the western sky, and the lower lines of dwellings dimmed and deepened into shadow. Twinkling lights glimmered in the distance, and at intervals long rows of lamps marked out the branching thoroughfares; but yet the roseate flush of an autumnal evening was lingering in the changing clouds that canopied the mammoth city; and borne upon the breeze of sunset came the murmurous din that ever indicates the toil and turmoil of the mighty multitude that dwell within its boundary.

"Here," said Bookers, who had first led them to the spot, and was now looking with meditative interest on the prospect mapped out before them—"here is the true source whence the poet might take his inspiration and the novelist his themes. There is no romance that can equal in stirring interest the real life that exists within the compass of our vision. What ardent hopes, what maddening disappointments, are perhaps at this very moment at work within the breasts of the great population whose abodes we now look down upon! Joy, sorrow, the strife of passion, the struggle of toil, the dreams of ambition, and the impulses of love, hatred, revenge, and crime, are all at this instant in operation, and unknown, because unchronicled. If we could take our stand here, and read human hearts, we should have more intensely-exciting pages open to perusal than the world affords on all its musty bookshelves."

"From what you have accidentally let fall in conversation," observed Thornton, as they quitted the place, and descended the hill towards town, "I conclude that you have yourself had some connection with literature. Am I right in my conjecture?"

"If my vanity were greater," returned the old gentleman, smilingly, "I could speak of what I had done with pride; but those days are past now, and I have long since abandoned the craft of authorship for employment of a less wearing nature, though it still links me with the books that formed my old companions. I have, however, mixed much in literary society in my time, and if, as I might judge from seeing you so frequently in the reading-room, you have some inclination towards the same profession, my advice might be of service to deter you from it."

"You have, then, no word of encouragement for one who should dare to tread the thorny path?" remarked Thornton; "but, surely, to be the editor of a newspaper now must be a proud position, to which one might be forgiven for aspiring?"

"Pass the boundary, and the illusions of the enchanted ground will have vanished," replied the other; "the onerous tasks enforced upon editors, as well as other men who once become slaves to the quill, are little thought of by the great mass of the public who read their productions. As an able novelist, who had felt what he described, once said to me, it is not the writing of the leading article itself, but the obligation to write that article every week, whether inclined or not, in sickness or in health, in affliction, distress of mind, winter and summer, year after year tied down to one task, remaining in one spot. It is something like walking a thousand miles in a thousand hours. He had a fellow feeling for them; for he well knew how a periodical would wear down one's existence. In itself it appears nothing—the labour is not manifest; nor is it the labour, it is the continual attention which it requires. Your life becomes, as it were, the publication. One week is no sooner corrected and printed, than on comes the other. It is the stone of Sisyphus—an endless repetition of toil—a constant weight upon the mind—a continual wearing upon the intellect and spirits, demanding all the exertion of your faculties at the same time that they are deadened by the severest drudgery."

"Your picture is any thing but cheering, and I trust a little overcharged," rejoined Thornton; "but surely every exertion of the mind is not attended with such discouraging consequences?"

"The mind," pursued his mentor, "is, after all, but the slave of matter; the mental is utterly at the mercy of the material. The delicate machinery of thought is apt to be clogged and impeded by the most trifling causes; and according to a theory I have long had upon the subject, for one good idea that a writer commits to paper, a hundred escape unrecorded through circumstances beyond his control."

"Indeed, I should like to hear some further explanation of your views," added Thornton, who saw that his companion had got upon his favourite hobby; "with these two evils to contend against, the author must indeed be a victim to his vocation."

"His greatest enemy," continued Bookers, "is perhaps his own nervous system. He cannot always escape from himself; and he is thus, in the first place, haunted by the frailties of his corporeal nature, which waylay him like a nightmare. Indigestion is a sad antagonist, and will freeze the genial current of inspiration at the very source. To write a great work a man must have a good stomach. The electric condition of the ganglions of the brain, necessary for the production of brilliant conceptions, is wonderfully influenced by the food absorbed into the body; and thus a skilful physiologist, who studied the question thoroughly, might be able to tell from the perusal of any work what the author has had for dinner during the time he was inditing it."

"Then you consider the world might have been deprived of its greatest literary treasures, had the writers been afflicted with dyspepsia?" pursued Thornton, determined to draw his eccentric acquaintance into further discourse upon that topic.

"Decidedly," rejoined Bookers; "for though these works were written at moments of favourable digestion, it is impossible to say what fine conceptions might have occurred to a man when he was physically incompetent to receive them; and so you see I am right in stating that the most valuable ideas die unborn. This was my case. I was engaged to write a series of sketches for a popular magazine; and having had some magnificent notions of the manner in which I should treat the subject, I contentedly drove it off to the last moment; but having regaled myself that day with unpropitious diet, I found my ideas strangled at their birth, and I resigned the last offer that was made to me from sheer dyspeptic inability to produce what was required at that exact time."

"The cook has really more to do with authors than I imagined," said Thornton, laughingly.

"Ah, sir," cried the other, "well would it be for

them if that was all; but their life is an endless contention with minor annoyances. The mere faculty of writing presupposes an irritability of temperament; and this irritability makes an author susceptible of discomfort from things which the more iron nerved would pass over as too absurd to be noticed. What savage slaughter may a barrel-organ player under your window unconsciously commit with the finest chapter of your novel; nay, even a fly settling upon the tip of the nose at the unlucky instant of inspiration may send the most glorious simile of the poet back into the chaos of ideal space, and scatter into nothingness the finest images that were ever consigned to immortality. It is rarely that the same idea recurs a second time; most of them once gone, are gone for ever,—'like the lost Pleiade, to return no more.'"

Beguiling the way back with such discursive conversation, it was not long before they came to the house, in the New Road, where Mr. Bookers and his friend Crummins resided. Thornton had gathered enough from the discourse to see that, however whimsical the illustrations of his new acquaintance might be, there was yet a considerable share of truth in his arguments, and he gladly resigned those ambitions thoughts that had previously occurred to him when pondering on the uncertain chances of a literary life. As they parted—for Thornton refused an invitation to prolong the evening party by a further stay—Crummins whispered to him aside that Bookers was "a very nice old gentleman to know, though rather strange on some points," and Caleb touched his forehead significantly; then he pressed him to call again soon and renew his visit, to which Thornton assented, and having bade adieu to his eccentric companion, he hurriedly retraced his path homeward, whilst Bookers and the city clerk ascended to their apartments above, and spent a couple at least of the succeeding hours in a quiet game at draughts, and a social supper with moderate spirituous concomitants superadded.

When Thornton reached home a great surprise awaited him. Emma had brought her friend, Mary Randall, to tea; and Mary, who had returned to Madame Duchard's, was in high spirits from having met her lover, Alfred Howard, that morning, and having appointed a meeting with him on the following day. Besides this, the mysterious lodger, who was said by Mrs. Marrables, the landlady, to be a commercial traveller, had returned to take possession of his long vacant apartment, and had intimated his wish to see the Thornton family early the next morning on some business materially affecting their future welfare; so that all were in high glee and the fullest expectation of some good fortune awaiting them. Mary was persuaded to share Emma's bed for the night, and, with the vague dreams of some impending change in their destiny, the whole party had little sleep, when, exhausted with the animated conversation on their forthcoming good prospects, they at last retired to their respective couches.

The next day was an eventful one for all. Mary, of course, did not fail in her assignation with Alfred Howard, who, it seemed, had gone on a voyage up the Mediterranean, been wrecked, and compelled to return to England. Their meeting had been purely accidental; but the real love that subsisted between them, strengthened by the test of absence, soon led to a reciprocal avowal of their mutual affection; and as Howard had had an excellent offer made to him by the owners of the vessel in which he had last sailed, it was arranged that their marriage should be celebrated immediately.

With the tidings of the anticipated change in her condition, Mary was returning late in the evening towards the residence of the Thorntons, when, happening to pause before a shop window on her way, a passenger hastily alighted from an omnibus that was rattling down the thoroughfare, and turning round, responsive to an exclamation that was uttered close to her at the same moment, Mary saw, with feelings of half pleasure, half surprise, the person of her father.

He was somewhat better dressed than usual, and his appearance generally exhibited a marked improvement. Mary was at first disposed to shrink from his advances; but his manners were so changed, and his language so kind and conciliatory, that she at once yielded to the impulses of filial affection, and warmly expressed her joy at meeting him again. After hearing from her a recital of the motives that had influenced her departure, and the events that had transpired since they last met, Randall entered into a detail of the particulars that had likewise altered the tenor of his own career; and then concluded by persuading her to accompany him to the offices of the solicitor, whither he was going when he saw her from the window of the passing vehicle.

The circumstance of their both visiting Mr. Jefferson that evening, led, however, to more important consequences than either had anticipated. Randall had mentioned the meeting with his daughter, and was about to further narrate the unsuccessful result of his inquiries, when the quick eyes of the solicitor, glancing on the silver cross that Mary still wore suspended from her neck, as the treasured gift of her lover, he started up, asked permission to examine it, and then, in a voice tremulous from emotion, inquired from whom that relic had been obtained.

Mary artlessly, and with blushful modesty, related the circumstances that had brought it into her possession, and then it turned out that Mr. Jefferson himself was the father of the child whom Alfred Howard had saved from a watery grave, and that this was the token of gratitude given on the occasion, and all that the gallant midshipman would receive. The replies given by Mary to other questions that naturally followed, elicited the important fact that Alfred was the heir to the estate who had been so long and so fruitlessly inquired after, and before midnight the astonished inheritor was sent for and made acquainted with the justice of his claims and the immense value of the property to which he was entitled.

Feeling that Mary had been chiefly instrumental in procuring for him this speedy settlement of his pretensions, and with his sentiments unchanged by the great accession of fortune he had acquired, Alfred insisted upon the pledge he had given being still unbroken; and though the disinterested girl was the first to surrender her claims to the wealthy land owner, whom she had loved for his own merits as a poor unknown midshipman, Howard was too generous to abandon her. Accordingly, a few days afterwards, the nuptial ceremony took place, with Emma Thornton officiating as bridesmaid; and a merry wedding-peal attended their departure from the church, as Mr. Jeffersen, and Alfred Howard, with his bride, entered the carriage that was to bear them to their future home; whilst Jacob Randall, who had, with feelings of gratified pride, witnessed the whole proceedings, returned homeward to meet the kind patron who had promised that day to interest himself on his behalf.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DENOUEMENT.

For some weeks the Earl of Winterton remained upon a couch of sickness, suspended between life and death, his brain wandering, and his senses only recalled at intervals by the sound of some familiar voice. The first visitor that he could recognise was Lord Walsingham, who, having overtaken his fugitive relative and her husband—for they had availed themselves of the earliest opportunity to link their fortunes together—had prevailed upon them to accompany him back, and now he volunteered to be their mediator with the earl.

As soon, therefore, as the convalescence of the nobleman permitted such an interview, Walsingham presented himself in the chamber of the invalid, and explained the mission with which he was entrusted. He had not himself expressed any objection to the alliance as soon as he discovered that Fitzroy Greene was the nephew of the earl; and he now earnestly besought the patrician to forgive the elopement on account of the causes that had led to it taking place. He urged the youth of Lady Adeline in extenuation of the fault, and intimated that the persuasive addresses of a younger admirer would have soon impelled her to break a contract in which love had no share. She had never analysed her own feelings, and she had mistaken the generous emotions of friendship which the earl had inspired for a warmer sentiment. As the day drew nearer for their marriage, the real state of her mind became more and more apparent, and she shrank from forming a solemn union with one whom she felt might be deeply esteemed and respected as a friend, but never loved as a husband. It was this and the earnest persuasions of Greene, whom she had known, it appeared, for some time previously, that influenced the step she had taken; and she had given her hand where she had already bestowed her heart. Although the original motive that had urged him to win the affections of Lady Adeline could not be defended, it was yet the wish of Greene to retrieve his character by pursuing a more honourable career for the future; and it was with those intentions that he now solicited the earl's forgiveness for what had transpired.

Smitten by the reflections that had occurred to him during his intervals of consciousness, and impelled by that forgiving temperament for which a long illness had prepared his mind, smoothing away those animosities that had embittered his previous existence, the earl not only consented to receive his nephew, but even offered him the only recompense that was in his power, the half of that property to which he would have been entitled by the heritage of his late father, the legal possessor. This, however, Greene declined, and contented himself with a trifling annuity which the sale of the Bradley estate produced. The rupture of his alliance with Lady Adeline Temple he regarded with feelings of neither wounded vanity nor useless regret. "It is better," he said to his now reclaimed nephew, as he called him to his bedside, "far better as it is. It was not to a young wife that I should have looked for a comfort in my declining years. Had Heaven blest me with a child, I should have been spared much affliction, for it is the want of some congenial sympathy that has made me what I am, a hopeless hypochondriac."

His wishes were, however, not so far off from being fulfilled as he imagined. Sir John Barrington, hearing that the Earl of Winterton was recovering from his recent indisposition, was his next visitor, and brought him truly the tidings of consolation.

The disclosures made by a dying man, who had been rescued, though fatally injured, from a late fire, and who had just breathed his last in the hospital to which he had been conveyed, came opportunely to the relief of the earl's anxiety. From these and the papers that were entrusted to Barrington for the purpose, the earl learned that he was not childless. The fair Gianella, over whose memory he had so long mourned, had died in giving birth to a daughter, and that daughter was Celestine, who, having been watched from infancy by the two ruffians who had decoyed her from the asylum where she had been received as an orphan, had crowned their infamy by attempting to trade upon the compassion her peerless beauty had excited. With these documents were given, by the repentant wretch Bazzini, such explanations as fully exonerated her from having had any participation in the robbery at Lord Walsingham's villa, and at the same time fully accounted for the apparently suspicious manner in which she had acted.

As soon as these particulars were made known to both, the utmost exertions were used to discover the place of her retirement; and guided by the friendly directions of Madame Romani, Walsingham was soon successful in his search. The meeting that took place was one of mingled smiles and tears. The Earl of Winterton, overjoyed at finding that the secret promptings of his heart had not been erroneously directed, clasped, with all the ardour of a fond parent, the child of wayward destiny to his bosom. Her purity was still inviolate; and Walsingham, renewing on a different footing the protestations he had previously made, was proud to acknowledge her as his wedded bride. The health of the earl was almost magically restored with the discovery of his daughter, and for some weeks the festivities at the earl's mansion, arising from the double marriages in the same family, and which were now publicly acknowledged, formed a fertile topic of conversation in the fashionable world, and were duly chronicled, with a long list of the guests attending, in the public prints of the day

Turn we now to the little village of Bradley, which had again become the scene of numberless happy smiling faces, and exhibited all the pleasant signs of reviving industry. The hall, instead of being the dull and gloomy mansion which it appeared at a former period of our story, was gay and brilliant with the change of ownership that had taken place. The long rambling rooms had undergone vast alterations and improvements. Upholsterers had been sent for from London to redecorate the apartments, the land was under good and skilful cultivation, and the honest labourers, who were selected from the most industrious in the village, were in the receipt of liberal wages, regularly and cheerfully paid.

Wandering about the grounds, and busily superintending the various arrangements, was seen Jacob Randall, the bird-fancier, and who now, as steward to the estate, an appointment which he had received from his unknown patron, who can however be no stranger to the reader, was at last happy and contented in his responsible vocation.

He had himself chosen to derive his subsistence from an employment of this kind in preference to remaining a dependant on the bounty of his daughter; and as the place was familiar to him from boyhood

he felt all the associations of home linked with it. The old inn, where he had spent some of his happiest days, had been repainted, and with the addition of a new signboard, formed a prominent feature of the village on entering from the London road. Here he would occasionally come and smoke his pipe, and think of old times; but what he had done during his metropolitan sojourn was kept a profound secret from the frequenters, and what he drank on these occasions always came within the strictest rules of moderation.

At last down came Sir John Barrington, the new owner of Bradley, and who had been the prime mover of the beneficial alterations that had been made in the appearance of the village and the comfort of the inhabitants. With him arrived Emma Thornton and her two brothers, Henry and the youngest, who had now improved wonderfully in health and stature. The supposed commercial traveller who occupied a room in the house of Mrs. Marrables, adjoining their own, had acquainted them with the intention of the baronet to invite them to his country seat as soon as the preparations for their reception were completed. They had been also told that on their arrival an important communication would be made to them which would have the effect of materially altering their future course of life; and now, with the expectation of such a disclosure, they were introduced to the old baronial hall. After viewing with delight and surprise the enchanting grounds through which they were conducted, and the costly appointments of the interior of the mansion, Sir John took them to the library, which has been noticed on a former occasion, and pointed out to them the cottages and the homesteads that skirted the valley in which the sequestered village was situated.

"Do you see," he said, as his eyes were moistened with the recollections called forth by the prospect, and his voice faltered as he indicated the spot—"do you see any object that you can recognise in the landscape?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Emma, eagerly, singling out one spot from among the rest; "look, Henry! there is dear mother's cottage standing just as I remember it when she was alive. It's flower-trellised porch, the jasmine and clematis that overgrew the old verandah, the garden and the arbour, are all there—every thing as we can recollect it when her hand trained the slender stems and culled the spring blossoms for our little chamber."

"And if your father—he that you knew by the name of Mordaunt—was here to greet you, how would you receive him?"

"I trust with the same earnestness of affection as our mother would have felt had she still been alive to welcome him," responded Emma, mournfully, for it was always with a tone of regretful tenderness that she spoke of him.

"And his past errors, if such they were—for the human heart should not be harshly judged—were amply atoned for," added Thornton. "We are orphans now; and if crime has blotted the memory of one of our parents, the stain has been since washed out by his children's tears."

"I can resist no longer," murmured Barrington, straining them alternately to his manly breast, and heaping passionate kisses and caresses on the youngest; "here let me throw off that disguise which for seven years I have assumed until I could claim you as my own with honour. Yes," he continued, as he saw their astonishment at his address, "I have anxiously looked forward to this moment to repay me for all the toils and perils through which I have struggled. As the commercial traveller, I occupied a room near you, that I might more closely watch your fortunes, and assist them, if necessary. It was thus that I visited Henry, on the first night of his arrival in London. As the Phantom, as Mordaunt, as Sir John Barrington, I have by turns donned a masquerade that was foreign to my nature, that I might devote myself, unfettered by the shackles of society, to the two great objects which I aimed at during this period of my life—avenging the fate of your mother, and restoring you, her children, to a position equal, if not superior, to that of which my weakness and imprudence had deprived you. But the noblest title by which I would be known to you is that of father, and with it is associated in my mind a greater dignity than the whole world can give besides."

The remainder of the day was passed in mutual congratulations and explanations. Barrington alleged that he had frequently been on the point of previously discovering himself, but anxious that they should both see something of the world, battle with its hardships, endure its taunts, and triumph over its disappointments, he had refrained from carrying his intention into effect. The school of adversity, he said, was the finest academy in which the heart could be educated—its lessons were never fruitless and never forgotten. It was to afford them the full benefit of that early training that he had suffered them so long to depend upon their own exertions. The estate, within the view of that abode hallowed by their early remembrances, he had bought for them, and, after his decease, it was to be shared amongst them. Of the means by which he had acquired his wealth he alone said nothing, but hinted to Thornton that some day he should place in his possession sundry documents that would reveal the only secret he for the present had withheld.

The re-united family had now unalloyed happiness within their reach. Emma, whose beauty was improved by prosperity, whilst it could not injure the innate goodness of her heart, renewed her former acquaintance with the light-hearted Mary, and, according to the last advices from Bradley, had solicited from her the favour of some such friendly office as she had herself performed on the occasion of that young lady's nuptials with Alfred Howard. Henry Thornton, too, her brother, was, according to the same authority, getting deeply interested in the marriage ceremony, and there is no doubt by this time that the name of Mr. Jefferson's pretty daughter—and who is a frequent visitor at the hall—has been changed for the one which he now bears. And when, in reply to Mr. Jefferson, who fancies that all these events are brought about by accident, Sir John Barrington

adduces some of the incidents in his own life as a proof to the contrary, he generally closes his argument in the emphatic words of a certain poet of the day, and affirms:

"Chance can do nothing. There's no turn of earth,
No, not the blowing of a summer's wind,
Or the unstable sailing of a cloud,
But hath a will that orders it."

A Parthian glance at some of the minor characters who have figured in our fleeting pages, and the story they record has reached its termination.

The astute Mr. Parkins is still in America, hopefully engaged in promoting one of the vast schemes that at the present moment may be said to occupy the attention of the transatlantic republic. From some remote cause however, they had not discovered the precise bent of his genius, and he was ignominiously reduced, from the exhaustion of his funds, to accept a small pittance as a ticket-collector on one of the newly-formed lines of railway.

Under the direction of John Oliver, who behaved throughout the voyage with a firmness that showed his energy of character, and a kindness that evinced his discretion in using it, Saunders and the rest of the men who formed a portion of the coiner's gang are working their way to ease and opulence in Australia. Jarvis alone, irritated by the restraints that were imposed upon him, demurred to the authority under which he was placed; and being detected in an attempt to regain his liberty by assassinating Saunders, who kept constant watch and ward over him, he was tried, found guilty, and sent to one of the penal settlements, where he is now expiating his past atrocities. The emigrants that were sent out at the same time by the assistance and judicious liberality of Barrington, are all thriving in the colony, and the last account received from Oliver, who regularly transmits a report of their circumstances, gave encouraging hopes that many hundreds of poor creatures, who would otherwise have perished in the streets, or been driven to the workhouse, were now in a permanently favourable position, and that their relations might soon join them with advantage to all parties.

Bazzini died in the hospital, as we have already intimated, from the effect of the injuries he sustained in the fire. The tortures he endured had, however, wrung from him a full disclosure of the iniquities he had practised during his life, and his death proved the means of unravelling the dark web which he had cast from time to time about his victims. The brutal padrone was not long without receiving the retribution he so justly merited. An act of barbarous cruelty inflicted upon one of the organ-boys brought him before the notice of a police magistrate, and having undergone his trial at the Old Bailey, Borelli was sentenced to three years' imprisonment and hard labour, a portion of which sentence he is still engaged in working out.

Of Caleb Crummins and his literary friend Mr. Bookers there is little to be said. They still pursue the even tenor of their life in amity together, and are often met about the suburbs taking short excursions to some favourite haunt a little distance from town. They are well known as frequenters of quiet inn parlours, and are held much in esteem by the landlords thereof, since the regularity of their visits has been the cause of attracting many to the rooms for the sake of hearing the peculiar discourse of the eccentric librarian.

Mr. Luke Sharp is still suffering from an intense dread of bailiffs, and is frequently encountered going at a rapid rate down back courts and secluded streets, that furnish him with the means of escaping observation, that he might have invited in his progress along the great thoroughfares. We believe he is at the present time waiting for something to "turn up;" and until that anxiously-looked-for event takes place, he is compelled to have recourse to sundry embarrassing shifts and expedients to scramble through each succeeding day.

Miss Crump, having seceded from the establishment of Madame Duchard, has become the forewoman of a cheap millinery establishment that works for one of the advertising tailors. Here her criticising and fault finding propensities have full scope for their development; and accordingly she is acknowledged to be a desperate tyrant to those beneath her in position, and, as is generally the case, a cringing, sycophantic menial to those in authority over her.

Dick has got into a comfortable situation, which Mr. Jefferson procured for him, and is now officiating in the double capacity of tiger and page in the family with which he is domesticated. The liberal allowance of diet, and the free access that Dick has obtained to the larder at all hours, have resulted in making his dress too tight for him to be worn without inconvenience, and he is therefore perpetually bursting off his buttons, to the amusement and emolument of the little boys who follow him on his morning walks, and make lawful prizes of the fugitive ornaments that he so liberally scatters on his way.

Bob Chuckers is getting on "famously," as he calls it; and the business, to which he has become quite a devotee, is thriving in consequence. Mr. Grigg has excelled himself in the production of rainbow-hued labels; and if a tradition whispered in the neighbourhood may be relied upon, this kind of paper-currency is generally received by Mr. Chuckers in payment of rent. As for Mr. Winkins, we are happy to announce that he had been singing so successfully at the tavern which he used to patronise with the display of his vocal capabilities, that it is said he was in a fair way of fascinating the proprietress, and the last time we heard of him he had married the widow. Latterly, Chuckers has been noticed to remain more at home than usual, and those who have passed his door, within the last week or two, have declared that the merry-hearted Bob was frequently visible in the little back parlour, smoking his meerschaum in the quiet enjoyment of matrimonial felicity, with one foot resting on the ledge of the chimney-piece, and the other, with praiseworthy patience and perseverance, rocking a cradle.

CHAPTER I.

"This even-handed justice
Returns the ingredients of the poisoned chalice
To our own lips."—*Shakspeare.*

The evening of the 8th of February, 1775—we must beg of our readers not to forget the date—closed in as cheerless a day as ever engendered the blue-devils, or suggested suicide to the despairing and wretched. The rain, mingled with a sharp arrowy sleet, had fallen with that leaden monotonous splash which, like the tick of the death-watch in a sick man's chamber, irritates the sufferer's nerves, fascinates his attention, and causes a sense of loneliness and depression. It had continued to fall without interruption almost the entire day; the short intervals between the showers were varied by a cold easterly wind, so sharp and piercing, that it searched to the very bones of the shivering, hungry, houseless wretches whom misfortune or crime left with no other shelter than the bleak, inhospitable streets. The evening was, if possible, more dreary than even the day had been; the tempest, which had gradually changed into a hurricane, shrieked and groaned alternately, like a despairing murderer's conscience, as it swept in violent eddies, or broke in gusts round the huge chimney stacks, and against the old gables which are disappearing daily from the street architecture of London. Not a chair or a carriage was to be seen unless at the court end of the town, where heartless pleasure holds its revels next door to misery, without a thought or a care whether its neighbour lives or starves—such is the world. Few who possessed the shelter of a home amongst the poorer classes cared to leave it on such a night; even Fleet Street and the busy Strand were deserted by all but the instruments of crime or the victims of misfortune.

It was about eight o'clock on the night we have endeavoured to describe that a young female, thinly clad, whose appearance denoted that respectable kind of poverty which is far more touching to the eye of sensibility than rags, was seen making her way over the slippery broken pavement of Fleet Street, and directing her steps towards Temple Bar. Her gown, though faded, had been a rich brocade; and the well-worn mantle, which the shivering creature had pulled tightly round her shoulders to protect her chilled

bosom and gloveless arms from the pitiless blast, was of uncut velvet. As she walked, or rather tottered, slowly along—for the wind was blowing in her face, and she was half-blinded by the sleet and rain—it would have been impossible to have mistaken her for any other than a gentlewoman, although most persons would naturally have wondered what could have brought her, alone and unprotected, into the streets at such an hour, and in such a night.

Death had already cast the shadow of his wing upon her features, which were marked by that delicate blush and transparent complexion which, like a veil, consumption casts over its victims to hide the ravage of the worm beneath. Her eyes, from the attenuation of her face, appeared unnaturally large, and shone with fever and excitement; occasionally a tear would dim their brightness, but with a resolute hand she dashed the intruder aside, and continued her desolate way.

That same night, in a dingy office in the Temple, were two persons seated by a blazing fire, which, although it imparted warmth, failed to give cheerfulness to the room. Tin boxes, containing title deeds, mortgages, proceedings in Chancery—in short, the history of many a tale of tears and wrongs—were ranged alphabetically upon the dusty shelves, beneath which was a large iron chest, where cash and more secret papers were secured. The head of this thriving office—for it was a thriving one—was Mr. Nicholas Prim, a gentleman in a business-like suit of snuff-coloured clothes and brown wig, who was listening with a cringing smile to his wealthy client, a tall, stately, stern man, dressed in black velvet, who was seated opposite to him.

While gazing on the features of Sir Walter Mowbray one might have imagined that some fine old family portrait by Vandyke had walked out of its richly carved dusty frame, there was such an air of aristocratic antiquity about his person, as well as in the characteristics of his face, which was of that intellectual paleness the painter loved so well and knew so admirably how to portray. The forehead of the baronet was high, broad, and massive, marked by those lines which strong passion or deep feeling seldom fail to trace. His cold grey eye indicated melancholy rather than pride, unless when excited; then its expression changed, and it flashed with all the fury of the enraged rattlesnake. The mouth alone conveyed in its sharp outline, thin compressed lips, and receding corners, the firmness and indomitable perseverance, whether for good or ill, which characterised the man. Differing from the fashion of the day, he wore his own dark hair, parted from the centre of his forehead; here and there a grey one mingled with the short thick curls, which descended to the collar of his coat—a mode which somewhat softened the natural sternness of his features, by giving them an expression of benevolence and kindness, to which, when the prejudices of rank or the ambition of his heart were not in question, he was in reality no stranger.

"It is near the hour," observed the weasel-faced lawyer, "that your daughter-in-law appointed to call, Sir Walter,—will you not remain and see her?"

"No," replied the baronet, sharply; "I have no wish to mark the writhings of the worm I am compelled to set my foot upon—I crush my victim, but I take no pleasure in its tortures. "Why," he continued, "did she cross my path?—I sought not to destroy her."

"She is very firm in her refusal to give up the papers which prove her marriage with your son.'

"Hunger is a sharp reasoner," said the stern father, with a cold bitter sneer.

"She hath endured it," continued Prim, "for weeks nay months, almost without a murmur, she and her child. Since her husband's death I have marked the gradual disappearance of every article of female ornament; clothes followed next. Her face has become thinner and thinner, and her dark eyes, which were once so beautiful, grow larger and larger, till even I sometimes feel uneasy beneath their melancholy imploring expression."

"And who is to blame?" demanded Sir Walter writhing uneasily in his seat. "She has only her own arts and presumption to thank for it. She, a thing without name or fortune, to wed my son, the heir of my ancient race! I shall go mad if I reflect on it. She may rot—die—starve—perish," he added, passionately, "in the streets for want of food, ere I bestow one guinea to relieve her, unless she resigns the proofs of this accursed marriage."

"*She will perish*, then," observed the lawyer, who seemed to take a malicious pleasure in exciting the evil passions of his client. "I have tried her every way, and never met a spirit more resolved; her resolution is not be shaken."

"A beggar's death o'ertake her, then," muttered the haughty baronet between his teeth. "Curse her—curse her, and the disobedient boy whose folly hath brought this shame upon my blood."

"He was the eldest of your sons, and consequently the heir to your estate and title?"

"You know he was. Richard, my second son, is more obedient; he weds to-morrow with the Lady Harriet Neville, one of pure Norman blood, and worthy to perpetuate my name and race."

"The silence, then, or the removal of this woman and her child is of importance?" said the man of law, at the same time peering curiously into the face of his visitor.

"It is, and must be accomplished," said his client.

"At any risk?" inquired Prim, with a peculiar look, which conveyed more than his words.

"At any risk," replied the baronet, emphatically.

"And by any means?" whispered the tempter, in a voice so low, it scarcely broke the silence by its sound.

"By any means," repeated the ambitious parent, in whom the pride of birth had stifled the natural feelings of the heart; "I seek not," he added, and his usually pale cheek became still paler as he spoke, "to know the instrument, or ask the means; let me but hear the plague-spot is removed, I shall not cavil at the price."

"Enough, Sir Walter," observed the lawyer; "we understand each other perfectly."

"Perfectly."

And the speakers gradually resumed their usual manner, as if the affair they had been settling had been one of the most ordinary occurrences in the world.

The next moment a half-starved looking clerk knocked to inform his master that Mrs. Mowbray was in the outer office waiting to see him.

"Let her wait till I ring," replied the man of business; "I am engaged at the present moment."

The baronet started and half frowned; his pride was shocked that any one who bore his name should be treated so cavalierly. The clear-sighted speaker saw the feeling, and inwardly smiled at its inconsistency.

The clerk withdrew with his message.

"You must pardon me, Sir Walter," said Prim, "but I thought you would not wish to meet the lady. I will see you from my chambers by the private stairs, and then return to wait on Mrs. Mowbray."

Sir Walter grimly bowed assent.

"You are still unchanged?" whispered the lawyer as he parted with his wealthy client at the door.

"Unshaken," replied the baronet, in the same tone, as he hastened to his carriage, which was waiting for him at the end of the court; "let what is to be done be accomplished quickly."

There was a look of quiet satisfaction on the countenance of the man of law, as he returned to his chambers; experience told him that no client paid so well as a rich one who was inclined to indulge in a little rascality. For a few moments he paced the room in silence; then having made up his mind thoroughly how to proceed in his design, he rang the bell.

The ill-clad, shivering female, whose appearance we described at the commencement of our tale, entered from the outer office; it was no other than Sir Walter's unhappy daughter-in-law, the friendless, widowed Mrs. Mowbray, whose appearance, since he had last seen her, was so much altered for the worse that even Mr. Prim was struck with something like pity and remorse; his compassion, however, went no farther than to induce him politely to offer her a seat.

"Well, my dear young lady," he began, in his blandest tone of voice, "I trust you have reflected on the offer which my worthy client authorised me to make, and that we shall understand each other at fast?"

"Did you give Sir Walter my letter?" faintly demanded his visitor.

"I did."

"And his reply?"

"None."

"None," she repeated, bursting into tears; "none. Surely he cannot know that we are starving? Has he a heart of flesh, or hath it ever throbbed with human love? Week after week, day after day, I have counted the weary hours of his return, and still been put off with hopes and promises. Sir, sir," she added, bitterly, "you have acted a sad part in this affair."

"My first duty is to my client," observed the lawyer, inwardly calculating how long the attenuated being before him might still continue to draw the breath of life.

"Your first duty is to your God and to humanity," replied the widow, rising; "perhaps, when I am dead, in those lone sleepless hours of the night in which reflection comes, and the brain holds converse with the heart, my memory will avenge me. As for Sir Walter Mowbray, I will sue to him no more."

"My agency in this affair," said Prim, assuming his most business-like look, "is professional, my dear madam—merely professional. You have only your own obstinacy to blame; resign those papers, which really, after all, give you no legal claim upon Sir Walter,—I say this upon my reputation as a lawyer—and I am instructed to offer the most liberal terms.

"Spare yourself the infamy of repeating them, sir," said the female, moving towards the door. "I will not brand the name of harlot on my brow, or rob my infant of his birthright, to purchase a few days of life. The worst," she added, laying her thin hand upon her heart, which beat fearfully from weakness and temporary excitement, "is past,—I scarce feel hunger now."

Here the speaker drew her faded wet cloak closer around her shivering frame, and then prepared to depart.

"Madam," said the man of business, "will you only inform me where those papers are?"

"In faithful keeping."

"May I not be permitted to see them, just to satisfy——"

"No."

"Were I convinced," he continued, endeavouring to assume an air of commiseration, "I might, perhaps, be induced to——"

The cold withering smile, the bitter scorn which passed over the features of his intended dupe, told him his attempt to deceive her came too late: she had seen too much of his real nature to be so grossly gulled. Despite his usual self-possession, he stammered, and stopped short.

"Go on," said the widow; "pray go on; or do you fear the mocking laughter of the fiends who hear you should wake the echoes of this den of crime?"

"Den of crime!" repeated the lawyer. "Fiends! Have a care, madam—have a care—such words are actionable."

"Murderer!" replied the woman.

"Murderer!" repeated Prim, turning very pale, and looking uneasily round the room, as if he fancied that his visitor saw some one.

"The world may not name it so," continued the widow; "but God will call it murder. I came to you a wretched, helpless, friendless creature, broken in heart as well as in fortune. How have you used me? Sold me to mine enemies, deluded me by lies from time to time, bidding me wait and wait, and preaching patience, till I have wasted every thing. Coolly you have seen *hunger do the cut-throat's work*, watched want and fever drink my youthful blood, till it has wrought your purpose. Ask your own conscience, sir, if this is not as clearly murder as the assassin's act; somewhat more safe, I grant you—more professional."

"My name, madam, is above slander," faltered the confused man of business.

"But it will be slandered," interrupted the widow, "and that too with one of earth's foulest slanders—the lying epitaph which greedy heirs or flattering friends will write upon thy grave, vaunting thy many virtues, as true as their own sorrow. But remember this," she added, "tomb thee in marble—inscribe what lie thou wilt upon thy grave, that worms will eat, and God will judge thee. Then shall we meet again."

Fixing her large dark eyes upon the trembling wretch, whose glance quailed beneath her gaze, she slowly left the office. Nor was it till the door had for some seconds been fairly closed between them that the man of law breathed freely. Although devoid of all moral, he was not without great physical courage; but for once even that was shaken. Opening a private recess, of which he invariably kept the key in his own possession, he drew from it a bottle of brandy, and helped himself rapidly to a portion of the contents.

After carefully restoring it to its customary hiding-place, he advanced to the door, which he opened, and called in his usual bland voice for James to be sent to him. Now James was his confidential clerk, and as great a hypocrite as his master; yet in all the nefarious transactions in which they had been mutually concerned, not a word had ever passed be-

tween them which could have compromised either. They were necessary to each other, and had so long and so successfully deceived the world, that at last they ended in deceiving themselves.

"James, did you see that lady who just left my office?" demanded Prim as the clerk thrust his long, thin face into the office of his principal.

The fellow nodded in the affirmative.

"And should you know her again?"

"From a thousand," replied the man; "she has a look one cannot easily mistake; a walking skeleton."

"She has rather a remarkable appearance," quietly observed the lawyer; "did you notice any thing peculiar in her manner—eh?"

"Sir——" James paused; the question was not sufficiently leading.

"Did she appear excited?" continued his master.

"Very, sir," answered the man, who perfectly understood him now; "very much excited."

"You had better follow her, James; *quietly and unobtrusively*, of course. Poor lady! I feel scarcely satisfied in suffering her to return alone. I should not be surprised in the morning to hear that she was very ill—very ill indeed, James."

"Nor I, sir."

"*Or had destroyed herself,*" added Prim, fixing a peculiar look upon his clerk.

"My very observation," said James, "as she passed through the outer office."

"Away at once—you have no time to lose; not that she can have gone very far, especially on such a night. I shall consider the extra trouble I have given you on Saturday, James."

"Thank you, sir. Any further orders?"

"No—stay; although I shall be in bed, you can knock at my door as you pass, and let me know as you return where the lady lives. You understand?"

"Perfectly. Ah, sir, you have a kind heart."

"I hope so, James; but you must not flatter me. Away with you."

With these words the master fiend resumed his seat at the table, while the bloodhound followed the track of his victim. By this time it was ten o'clock.

About a quarter of an hour after the departure of James, Mr. Prim gathered up his papers, and after depositing them carefully in the iron chest, went into the outward office, to dismiss the two remaining clerks, whom press of business had detained beyond the usual hours. No sooner were they gone, and the doors made fast, than the man of law proceeded to business: first he divested himself of his respectable brown scratch, which was as well known in the different courts at Westminster as the chancellor's wig or the crier's voice; he replaced it by another of shaggy black hair, which fell over his forehead, and entirely altered the expression of his face; the next process was to deepen his sandy eyebrows with Indian ink, and colour his features with a powder which gave them a swarthy, dingy hue. A spectator, to have seen him, would have taken him for a good humoured old gentleman, preparing for a masquerade, or an actor, who, having performed the pious, sentimental father in the play, was making up for the part of a brigand in the farce. The first supposition would not have been far wrong, only that the masquerade he was disguising himself for was one in which ruffians formed the principal characters, and crime, not pleasure, the object of pursuit. His quiet snuff-coloured suit was exchanged for one of coarse dark cloth, well padded, and which completely altered his appearance. Placing a brace of pistols, which generally hung over the chimney-piece in his office, in his pockets, his disguise and preparations were completed. He once more resumed his seat, and occupied himself with the bottle, which he drew from its secret recess, and patiently awaited the return of James.

In writing a tale there is nothing like giving a daguerreotype portrait of the characters—it impresses them upon the memory of the readers, and clothes them with an individuality necessary to the working of the plot.

Prim had not long to wait after his preparations were completed. A low knock at the outward door announced that his emissary had returned.

"Have you followed my instructions?" demanded the man of law.

"I have, sir, and the lady too. She resides in a lodging in the Almonry, three doors from the Crown and Bear, on the left-hand side."

"There was no occasion to tell me that," replied the hypocrite, who was secretly delighted at the information. "Do you suppose me ignorant of the residence of a client who has the most perfect confidence in me?"

"Of course not," said the man, who perfectly understood him; "but it is a wretched place for such a lady," he continued—"a low, damp room, over a loft, and at the end of a narrow court, looking on to a piece of waste ground at the back; it must be a very cheerless view, sir."

"Very," said his master, to whom the information was invaluable. "You saw the lady in safety, I hope?"

"I did, sir."

"Good night, then, James. I have been in bed some time, for I am fatigued after my labours of the day. Make haste home, and mind you do not take a cold, for the night is a pitiless one."

"God bless you, sir," exclaimed the fellow, as he shuffled down the stairs.

"God bless you, James."

And with this benediction, which was a blasphemy in such mouths, the clerk returned to his lodgings, and left his vile employer to sally forth.

St. George's-in-the-Fields, at the period of which we write, was a desolate, uninclosed piece of waste land, occupied occasionally by the travelling waggons of the showman or itinerant mountebank, whose half-starved, ill-used, spavined, rough, wretched-looking cattle excited the commiseration of the passer-by, as he saw them perseveringly nibbling the short, stunted grass with their worn teeth—too frequently their only provender. Amongst the more prominent habitations was a low public-house, known by the name of "The Rising Sun." It stood in the midst of three or four low, dirty cottages—or, more properly speaking, huts—inhabited by the very refuse of humanity, the scum of crime and dissipation. This house, which was a regular rendezvous for desperate characters of all sorts, was kept by one Sedler, or "Gipsy George," as his pals familiarly called him, from his supposed descent from that nomade race. By the fry of young thieves, the crop which society is annually raising for the gibbet, he was styled "Mister George;" for his ferocious bearing and success in baffling the pursuit of justice excited their admiration and respect. His admirers cited him as a young soldier might have cited Eugene or Marlborough; copied his bold, swaggering manner; repeated his oaths; and referred to him as an undoubted philological authority upon all questions of slang. In short, he was a ruffian who had been every thing by turns—poacher, pickpocket, housebreaker, highway-

man, smuggler, thief, and smasher. Those who knew him intimately doubted if even these titles of honour completed the list. There were whispers of an old farmer who had been found with his throat cut on his return from market, and his watch and pocket-book seen in George's possession; but as the fact was never brought home to him, men were careful how they repeated the accusation, for he was as ready with his blows as with his tongue.

For some years he had retired from the risks and general duties of his profession, and only practised as a retired physician might do, when called in by some wealthy rascal, in a case of emergency. Prim, in the course of his life, had frequently availed himself of his services, although, with his usual caution, he never appeared before him unless disguised in the manner we have described, and well armed—he knew his man too well to trust him. The lawyer's success in baffling recognition had excited in the mind of his instrument a sort of professional jealousy, and he determined, on the very next occasion on which he should employ him, to ascertain, if possible, his abode and name—to keep him as a sort of stock-pigeon, to be plucked at his ease.

The interior of the Rising Sun, on the night in question, was crowded. The weather was too wretched even for crime to stalk abroad, unless urged on by hunger or strong temptation; and many of the most desperate thieves and flash girls were drinking gin and ale, singing obscene songs, or recounting to each other their exploits, to wile away the time. In one corner might be seen some wretched youth, whose appearance denoted that his heart was not quite abandoned, gazing with a half-fearful smile upon the scene, or listening to the temptress who had seduced him from honesty, and who was urging him to still more fearful crime, to sell him, most probably, at last, into the hands of justice, when tired of her dupe, or that her arts had entangled another victim. Several of the dark-faced sons of Israel were seated at the tables, buying watches, trinkets, or handkerchiefs, at a price which would have made their original owners stare, but which the vendors, low as it was, might truly say was considerably over "prime cost." It was astonishing the amount of commercial transactions occasionally concluded in that low, dirty, dingy, smoky room. Diamonds, which, but a few evenings before, had blazed upon the neck of beauty, or glittered at St. James's, changed hands, after being taken from their delicate settings, and sold, still "over prime cost."

A girl known by the name of Dirty Bet, a tall slovenly jade, had just called that respectable dealer, Mr. Aaron Wolf, aside to show him a string of pearls, which her fancy man, who was an experienced thief, had brought her the night before. Just as she gave them into the hands of the Jew, whose eyes sparkled with cupidity and joy as he beheld them, the landlord left the inner bar, and entered the lower room.

"Vell! vat do you vant for this rubbish?" demanded the Israelite, after carefully examining them to see if they were real.

"Three cuter," cried Bet. This was the flash word of the day for guineas.

"Tree devils!" exclaimed the Jew; "vat do you tink I steal my monies that I should part with it so foolishly? No—no—had it been gold it vould have been a tifferent ting; nothing but beads. As I am an honest man, I can't afford more than von."

When Mr. Aaron Wolf appealed to his honesty, it was a settled thing; he was never known to raise his price. The wretched girl, although ignorant of the value of the article, felt that she was overreached, but was compelled to take it. Just as he pocketed the bargain, Gipsy George whispered to him, "We go halves!"

"Certainly," said the Jew, with a discontented scowl.

This little episode was no interference with the general harmony of the evening; but took place without interrupting the song of "Bold Dick Turpin," which a young aspirant for the gallows had been singing.

At this moment there was a loud knock at the door; in an instant all was silent, and the heart of many a blustering villain sank within him: it might be a party of Bow-street officers.

"Douse the glims!" cried one.

"Slip the juke!" exclaimed another, whilst several were seen making their way to the back of the house.

Mr. Aaron Wolf took the pearls from his pocket, and quietly dropped them unseen, as he thought, into the full pot of ale which was standing before him.

"Who is there?" at last demanded the landlord.

"John Brown, from Hampstead," was the reply.

"All right," exclaimed Gipsy George; "a friend, I'll be with you in a minute."

The song and conversation were immediately resumed, and the respectable trader fished up his pearls again. The landlord took a rough cap from a peg in the bar, and pulled it down upon his forehead, so as to conceal his face as much as possible, tied a handkerchief over his mouth, and after whispering to his better-half to keep a sharp look-out, a task she was perfectly equal to, quitted the house, a few yards from which our old acquaintance Prim was waiting for him.

"What is it?" said the ruffian, bluntly.

"Merely a little business," replied the lawyer, in his usually kind tone; "a mere trifle."

"Humph! trifle! Men like you," said the fellow, "don't leave their warm beds on such a night as this for a trifle."

"How do you know I have a warm bed?" demanded the party to whom the speech was addressed.

"Because your hand is white and soft. I observed it as you counted down the guineas for that last affair, and your voice is low and even. Had you slept in the open fields as many nights as I have done, it would be rough like mine."

"You are a curious observer," said the lawyer.

"I was not born yesterday," muttered the fellow with a grin; "but what is it?"

As from previous transactions there was no need of delicacy between them, Prim, without hesitation, opened his purpose to him, which was nothing less than to enter the chamber of Mrs. Mowbray and bring away the papers he required, or the child—it was immaterial to the lawyer which. Fifty guineas was the price agreed upon.

"Should she resist?" said Sedler, as they walked together towards the Almonry.

"Have you not a knife?" demanded his respectable companion.

"Do you mean," said the fellow, taken aback by his coolness, "that I am to cut her throat?"

"Not unless it's necessary."

"Necessary! necessary be damned!" replied the ruffian; "have you no conscience? would you lead me to murder, when I only bargained for robbery? Damn you for a shark! I would not do it for any man —*at the price!*"

The lawyer smiled to himself, and secretly ad-

mitted the justice of the objection. There were many dirty undertakings which he also would have refused—*at the price*.

"It shall be doubled in the event of an accident," said Prim—for so he characterised murder.

His companion was perfectly satisfied, for he made no further objection.

By this time they were in the Almonry, close by the narrow court which James had so faithfully described.

The widow and her child—a beautiful infant about a year old—were reposing upon the low truckle bed, to which poverty consigned them. The damp faded garments of the unhappy mother were spread upon chairs before the remnant of the miserable fire, whose faint flickering blaze only served to make the squalid wretchedness of the chamber more apparent. The remains of a loaf were placed in a cracked blue plate upon the shelf; it had already lasted the widow and her son two days. A jug of water stood beside it. A couple of broken chairs completed the furniture of the room.

The creaking of the old casement, as Gipsy George skilfully pressed it open, was not heard by the sleeping woman amid the pelting of the storm without. First the ruffian introduced his head to ascertain that all was right. Satisfied with the scrutiny, he speedily introduced his whole person.

"Papers!" muttered the ruffian, turning the bull's-eye of his lantern and looking round; "I shall find no papers here. Why the place is as bare as the abode of Famine! Damn me if a well-bred cat would condescend to stay in it. It is the kiuchin I must take!"

The ruffian turned towards the bed on which the infant slumbered in the arms of its dying, hapless mother, whose instinctive love even in sleep protected the young nestling.

"I shall never grab him without waking her," he mentally decided.

Gipsy George was a man to prepare for all difficulties; he coolly took a clasp knife from his pocket, and seeing no place but the bed to rest his lantern on, opened the keen, razor-like blade with his teeth. At this instant the sleeper slightly stirred; he shaded the light and held in his breath.

"If she wakes," thought the fellow, "I shall have no reason to use my knife; blood makes such a mess; it is apt, too, to get on one's clothes, and does not look well with a jury. A rap from my fist will settle her; she seems half-starved and half-dead already—it would be charity, and not murder."

He once more approached the bed; and, placing his hand upon the sleeping child, commenced drawing it from its mother's arms. Startled either by the coldness of his touch or the motion, ere he had half succeeded the infant awoke, and with its cry alarmed the mother.

What would you?" she cried, gasping with surprise and terror, but still clinging to the infant.

"Let go your hold," said the villain, doggedly.

"You'll hurt my child—do not, pray do not drag him; if plunder is your object, we have nothing, absolutely nothing."

"I know that—it is the child I want."

"Never while I live—think not of it; a mother's love is stronger than her fears. Help! murder! help! God, is there no assistance? Help! I say. Monster, you'll break his tender limbs! My boy—my boy!"

Weak as the poor creature was, she clung so firmly to her child that she permitted herself to be dragged half out of her bed ere she relinquished her hold. Even then it was more from the fear of injuring him than exhaustion. Maternal love supplied her with a momentary strength.

"Cease your squalling," said Sedler; "the brat will be taken care of."

Despite the assurance, the widow sprang from her recumbent position, and rushed to the door to alarm the neighbourhood with her cries, when the ruffian, perceiving her intent, caught her by the hair, and dragged her back to the bed.

"Would you murder me?" she sobbed.

"Not unless you force me."

Here her cries were repeated, for she was driven frantic at the sight of her infant screaming and struggling in the rude grasp of the wretch. Finding it impossible to quiet her, and fearing that her shrieks might eventually bring assistance, he struck the emaciated creature a blow, which, as he had calculated, caused her death, for her chest and lungs were instantly deluged with blood, which oozed slowly from her lips.

"I thought that would quiet you, woman!" he muttered.

The dying creature fixed her large dark eyes upon him, and pointed to heaven. The murderer understood the appeal, and shuddered: his eye sank beneath her gaze.

"In a moment," she murmured, in a voice which, though faint, fell upon his ear with a terrible distinctness, "I shall stand before the throne of God to accuse thee at His bar!—Harm not my child, lest His wrath overtake thee! Remember," she added, "I shall be there to plead for him; spare him, and I will pardon thee!"

The suffering woman, whose last thought was for her child, expired with the word upon her lips.

Hastily detaching from his victim's neck a black ribband, with a silk bag at the end, Gipsy George descended by the window with his prey.

"Now, have you secured the papers?" demanded Prim, who had been impatiently waiting for his associate at the back of the wretched hut in which the widow dwelt.

"No."

"No!" repeated the lawyer, in a tone of disappointment, for he expected a thousand pounds at least for producing them.

"But I have got the brat, if that will do as well," said Sedler.

"And the mother?" whispered his employer.

"Croaked."

"Did you knife her?"

"Not so green; she was half dead already. You must have dealt sharply with her to have sweated her dainty limbs to such a bundle of bones. I gave her but one clip, to silence her squalling, and—but let us talk about something else. I am out of practice, and getting squeamish, I suppose."

Prim counted out the hundred guineas which he had brought in a small canvass bag. He was sometimes a liberal paymaster; and after receiving the terrified infant, which he concealed under his rough coat, bade his tool good-night, and made the best of his way to St. James's Park on his road home. But it was no part of Sedler's policy to part with him thus. With all the instinctive cunning of his gipsy race, he felt that if he could but discover who his mysterious employer really was, the hundred guineas he had just received would be but the least part of his remuneration for his night's work. At first he walked, whistling

a loud tune, towards the bridge; the night was so dark, that it was impossible to distinguish a yard before his face; then he suddenly stopped, but still continued to whistle, modulating the sound till it became fainter and fainter, so as to convey to any one who listened that the space was gradually being increased between them. As soon as the note ceased, he fell flat upon his face, like an Indian, and placed his ears to the ground.

"So," he muttered, "he has been listening. It's a practised hand I have to deal with; I must be cautious. Now he moves away."

With an ability which it must have cost him considerable practice to acquire, Gipsey George retraced his steps, running like a dog, till he distinguished his late companion making rapidly towards the park. Like most beasts of prey, he had a quick eye in the dark.

"Good," he thought to himself; "I can dodge him rarely behind the trees."

But the respectable lawyer had as quick an eye as George, and gave as few chances away. Rapidly as he pursued his route, still from time to time he turned his head to ascertain if he were followed, and at last became sensible that such was the case. But the pious rascal was prepared.

"So the bloodhound is on the scent," he said; "well let it cross me."

At this moment he entered one of the avennes, where the darkness was even more palpable, and concealed himself behind the trunk of a tree till his pursuer should come up, first drawing a pistol from his pocket, and carefully placing his fore-finger on the trigger.

In another minute the assassin and his employer stood face to face.

"You are dogging me," said Prim.

"And what then?" demanded the ruffian, drawling out his words; "s'pose I am?"

"Your motive?"

"Mere *perliteness*," said the fellow. "I like to return the visits of my friends."

"A step further," continued the lawyer, "and you never quit the park with life. Fool!" he added, as the gipsy thrust his hand into his pocket, on hearing the threat, to search for his knife; "my pistol covers you, my finger is on the trigger; it is charged with *two bullets and a slug*. Stir—make but the slightest motion of your hand, and I will spatter your brains against yon tree."

The speaker uttered this fearful menace in as soft a tone as though he had been wheedling a client, or persuading some nervous invalid to make his will."

"You dare not," said the fellow, doggedly; "it would alarm the guard."

"Pooh!" replied the respectable man; "I have another hundred guineas in my pocket—know the police magistrates intimately—am rich, rich; you understand. Why, man, I should be thanked for ridding the world of such a scoundrel. Perhaps, after all, it would be the wisest plan."

The muzzle of the pistol touched the brow of the gipsy as he spoke. The bully was cowed — the rich villain was too much for the poor one. He shuddered at the cold contact with the barrel.

"At ten I fire," continued the lawyer, quietly; "one, two, three——"

"Perhaps," faltered the fellow, willing to make a decent retreat, "you will give me that other hundred you spoke of?"

"Six, seven, eight," said Prim.

"But one moment."

"Nine."

Before he could utter the fatal "ten," the ruffian, fairly cowed by the cool resolution of the man, whose personal strength to his was as a child's, took to his heels, nor paused till he was beyond the reach of his pistol. Prim replaced the weapon in his pocket with a quiet laugh, and resumed his way towards home.

This time he was not followed.

As he walked along he debated with himself how he should dispose of his innocent burthen. His first thought was to toss it into the Ranger's Pond, which at that time had not been filled up; his second was to leave it on one of the benches under the trees, where the cold night wind would soon stifle its feeble cries, and puff out its flickering flame of life. As he never committed crime unnecessarily—he was an economist, even in guilt—he preferred the latter course; and the helpless creature was left that bitter night exposed to the sleet and rain, with no other covering than the little night-dress in which it had been carefully enveloped when Sedler tore it from its sleep.

But God and its mother's spirit were doubtless watching over it.

On returning from his round, about half an hour after Prim had left the park, Sergeant Gourlay, a rough but excellent soldier in the Fusiliers, brought into the guard-room a child apparently dead; its little limbs were stiffened with cold, its breath scarcely perceptible, and its eyes were closed. After much chafing and rubbing before the fire, one of the men suggested the blowing of some tobacco up its nostrils. The experiment was tried, and proved successful.

We most of us feel an interest in the creature we have preserved. It was recollected that Mrs. Corporal White had just lost her baby. The worthy sergeant, after obtaining leave of his officer, stepped with his prize to the barracks, and in a few minutes the little stranger was nestled at the breast of the corporal's wife.

It is astonishing with what a light heart, although the night was wet and bitterly cold, Sergeant Gourlay returned to the guard-room.

CHAPTER II.

I wandered through the gorgeous room,
'Mid silken robes and waving plume;
And there were bright and living rays,
Darting from woman's love-lit eyes,
Which far outshone the diamond's blaze,
Or e'en old ocean's richest prize.

On the same night Sir Walter was at a brilliant party at Earl Heartley's, as cold and unconcerned as though, in abandoning his daughter-in-law and grandson to starvation, he had performed a virtuous action. He went regularly to church, paid his bills (for he was very rich), and the world looked on him as a virtuous man; but the world was far, very far, from being in the right.

No two characters could be more dissimilar than the Earl of Heartley and his countess: the husband, frank, open, and unsuspicious—in politics an ultra Tory, in religion a high churchman; the wife, once a celebrated beauty, though now rather *passé*, fond of scandal, a confirmed coquette, and the relentless enemy of all who opposed her supremacy in the world of *ton*, but sufficiently artful to disguise her attacks under the mask of apparently good-humoured badinage. Fond of rule, Lady Heartley tyrannised over all who fell within the influence of her sphere, except-

ing her husband, whose temperament was such as experience showed was not to be shaken either by the reproaches or tears, or, what is more difficult to resist, the smiles of a beautiful and fascinating woman. The issue of this ill-assorted union was a son and daughter, both fondly beloved by the earl, but objects of their mother's capricious dislike or cold regard, as vanity or maternal feelings ultimately prevailed; for the countess felt that, upon their entrance into society, her hitherto undisputed supremacy in the world of fashion must cease; no woman, whatever her claims to the admiration of the male sex, being able to stand against the formidable rivalry of a grown-up daughter, or the ridicule of the name of grandmother, which the marriage of either of her children would in all probability soon give her a claim to. The daughter, Lady Mary, being of a mild temper and retiring habits, gave her little uneasiness; but her son, Lord Henry, frequently put her patience and politeness to the test. She was fond of treating him as a mere boy, which he resented by speaking of her as soon to be a grandmother. As he advanced in years, the contest became unequal, and her ladyship seldom ventured on the attack.

Lady Heartley, surrounded by her own select circle, was seated in her boudoir—not the luxurious apartment of the present day, where splendour, directed by the hand of taste, produces an *ensemble* worthy of the retreat of beauty—but a small chamber, situated at the end of a suite of drawing-rooms, where the earl was receiving his guests; a task which she frequently left her lord to do, especially when they were political friends, in whom she took no interest.

The little knot of beaux and belles were busily occupied in discussing the merits of an absent beauty, when Oscar, her ladyship's favourite black page, entered with the evening paper, which by some means had been delayed.

"Give the journal to Mr. Vavasour," said Lady Heartley to the youth; "we constitute him clerk of our council."

The gentleman—a delicate, bilious-looking person, habited in a silver-laced suit of pea-green satin—bowed profoundly at the mock royal mandate, and commenced his task. The first article which attracted the attention of the party was the announcement of the marriage of Miss Lacey with Lord Marston. A wedding is at all times an interesting subject, especially with the ladies; nor was it less so on this occasion, as the parties were known to most present.

"At last!" exclaimed Lady Margaret Bouchier, colouring with vexation through her rouge. "Well, how extremely happy I am! She deserved him, considering the patience with which she angled for him. I was rather friendly with his lordship while he was staying with my father last year," she added, "and used frequently to recommend her to him."

The friends of the speaker all smiled at her disinterestedness, well knowing how much to believe of it.

"She will make him, at any rate, a handsome wife," observed Lady Heartley, not unwilling to play off her guest; "her figure, too, is superb She must have looked remarkably well in her bridal dress."

"My sweet creature,' replied the lady to whom the observation was particularly addressed, "Miss Lacey's figure superb! my milliner assures me that she is quite crooked and wears pads on either side."

"Oh! Lady Margaret!"

"But her bust," perseveringly added the mistress of the mansion, "that at least is perfect."

"Oh—yes—yes," chimed several of the female speakers; "we can all vouch for that, after the liberality with which it was displayed. There was no deception there."

Her ladyship was silent; she had called forth a sneer against one who might by possibility contest her influence in the world of fashion, and was therefore an object of dislike. She had exposed the weakness of a friend, whose less skilful malice she had played off in contrast to her own assumed good nature, and she felt perfectly satisfied. Such was her policy.

Vavasour recommenced.

"A report has reached town that a certain northern duchess, whom we will not more particularly name, for fear of wounding the feelings of her noble relatives and fashionable friends." Here the corner of the paper was unfortunately torn off; the parties looked at each other; there was a pause.

"Provoking!" exclaimed Lady Heartley, her curiosity strongly excited; the duchess alluded to having been her most formidable rival in the fashionable world. "What can have followed?—something strange."

Here the speaker's eye glanced round the circle, as if to ask the confirmation of the opinion which she hesitated to give.

"Does not Sir Frederick Dudley's estate join the duke's?" demanded Miss Hunter with marked emphasis; "I have heard that formerly he was a very warm admirer of her grace. I know," she added, "that he has suddenly broken up his establishment, and retired to the continent."

"Oh, yes," added Mrs. Rushton; "and now I recollect his attentions to her at Ranelagh were very marked."

The hint was readily taken, and every lady present immediately remembered something discreditable to the fame of the duchess.

"For my part," observed one, "I never altogether approved of her manners; she was much too free for my notions of propriety. I am rejoiced that she was not at my *fête* at Richmond."

"Or at my *bal masque*, or my *petite souper*, chorused several others.

"Stay, my dear ladies," exclaimed Mr. Vavasour with a malicious smile, "here is another paragraph.

"Oh, do read it," cried the ladies, in every variety of tone.

"We regret to announce to our readers," continued the gentleman, "that the report alluded to in another part of our paper is unfortunately confirmed." Here the reader paused.

"I thought so," said Lady Heartley, with a smile of satisfaction; "lost, abandoned creature."

"Shocking—very sad affair," responded the rest of the party; "pray go on."

"Her grace *expired* suddenly at her noble husband's seat, Glenthorn, in the Highlands, on the first of the present month. The duke and family remain inconsolable for their sad untimely loss."

There was a silence of some minutes; cold and heartless as the scandalmongers were, they could not receive the intelligence of the death of the lady whose reputation they were destroying without some compunctious visitings of conscience. But as silence gives time for reflection, which Lady Heartley desired to prevent, she resumed the conversation.

"Poor dear duchess!" she exclaimed with a sigh—but whether of disappointment or grief it would be difficult to decide. "How sudden! So good a creature, too! I wonder who will have her diamonds? I declare I

feel quite out of spirits. Vavasour, have the goodness to reach my scent-bottle. No, you need not trouble yourself, I have my etui."

And disengaging the golden appendage from her side, she applied the essence to her handkerchief.

"And I, too," added Mrs. Rushton, in a sentimental tone, "feel quite hurt at the intelligence. Such an excellent woman! Really, it is quite shocking, especially when we remember how we were pulling her to pieces."

Could a look have annihilated the indiscreet speaker, the one given by Lady Heartley would have produced that effect; but Mrs. Rushton was not a person to be silenced by a look, and she returned it by one of haughty indifference.

The countess, for several reasons, having no wish to quarrel with her visitor, smoothed her ruffled brow, and replied in a tone of well-affected surprise:

"Pulling her to pieces! Why, my dear Mrs. Rushton, you could not really for one moment imagine that we were in earnest? It was but a little harmless pleasantry, at which the poor duchess would have been the first to smile. Had any thing serious been intended, I should have been the first to resent it. You know I always defend my absent friends; besides, we were distantly connected."

The rest of the party, taking the hint, declared that all their observations were meant in strict good nature, and without the slightest intention of defaming the character of one so amiable, as *every body* knew the duchess to have been.

It was a considerable relief to the conversation when Oscar announced two visitors, Mr. Radcliff and Mr. Gerald Fitzgerald.

"Radcliff—Fitzgerald! who are they, my love?" demanded Miss Hunter. "The names sound well. They were not of your set last year, or I must have known them. Neighbours in the country, I presume. Who may they be?"

"That is a question I shall be obliged to any one to answer me, for at the present I am as much in the dark as you are. All that I know of the former is that he has just bought the Monkshold property which adjoins ours, and that he is reputed to be very rich. Heartley knows them, but is provokingly silent on the subject. By his request," she added, "I am to receive them most graciously."

The two gentlemen made their bow as her ladyship

finished. The elder, Mr. Radcliff, was a tall, stately-looking person, plainly but elegantly dressed, whose air and high breeding at once stamped him as a gentleman. His companion was a young man, about twenty, whom he afterwards presented as his grandson.

"My dear countess," he said, "I am delighted to renew my acquaintance. In the old fellow before you, you have doubtless forgotten an attached friend of your family, as I should have failed to recognise in the lovely wife of my friend the little Hebe whom I left at her tambour when I quitted England."

Her ladyship had sufficient tact to perceive that it was some one whom she ought to have recognised from the name, and although surprised at the familiarity of the address, replied to it in a becoming manner, for there was a stateliness and refinement in the tone of the speaker which bore the impress of high birth.

"Have you been long absent from England?" incautiously demanded the lady, after the customary compliment.

"Nearly forty years."

The ladies looked significantly at each other, and Miss Hunter whispered to her neighbour rather maliciously:

"It is well that Hebe is immortal, or the world would imagine that she was getting old."

The countess bit her lips in silence, inwardly angry at her want of discretion. She had overheard the whisper of her *dear friend*, but was too politic to notice it.

"You must have been a great traveller," observed Vavasour, coming to her relief, by turning the attention to Radcliff. "Your grandson, I presume, has been your companion. I envy you," he continued, turning to Fitzgerald, who had hitherto remained silent, "the gay cities of France and Italy, which doubtless you have visited. I fear you will find England, after such scenes, dull and uninteresting."

"Uninteresting it can never be to me," replied the young man, for the first time breaking silence. "It is the land of my fathers, though not of my birth. I have certainly visited the countries you name, but know little of their gaieties, since the greater part of my life has been passed in the wilds of Switzerland."

"In Switzerland!" repeated the man of fashion. "Why, in the name of heaven, where did you find masters to fence—to ride—to dance—in that barbarous country?"

"I confess," said the youth, with a smile, "I know but little of the accomplishments you name, but I found books."

"Books!" iterated his questioner, with a sneer; "if you found books doubtless you became a philosopher as well as a recluse. The character is new in one so young, and may take; for really last year's lions were but bores."

Fitzgerald colored to the temples; he did not exactly comprehend the fashionable banter of Vavasour, but felt strongly tempted to knock him down. His grandfather, though so long absent from what the world calls society, perfectly understood its tone, and answered for him.

"When impertinence usurps the place of wit, either in general or particular society, it must naturally follow that its leaders become bores. Have I the honour of addressing Mr. Vavasour, of Kirkton Manor?" he added.

The gentleman stiffly bowed.

"Indeed," resumed Mr. Radcliff, "to one of *your pure birth* and undoubted position in society, the evil you complain of must indeed be insupportable."

The sneer which accompanied the last remark, and the sting which it conveyed, were only understood by the speakers; the rest of the company were mystified. Vavasour turned pale, and addressed some trivial observation to the countess.

"Heartley, I presume," continued the old gentleman, addressing her ladyship, "is plunged as deeply as ever in politics. I fear you have not tried the effects of your smiles to reclaim him from them."

"The smiles or frowns of wives are but little regarded," replied her ladyship. "Men seem to disregard both when they change the name of lover for that of husband."

"Fie! Lady Heartley, fie!" exclaimed Vavasour, endeavouring to recover his composure; "a libel on the influence of your sex, and from one of its fairest despots."

"True for all that," said Mrs. Rushton. "Men after marriage are little better than tyrants, as I by melancholy experience can prove."

As the speaker had already buried her third husband, she could not be accused of giving her opinion upon slight grounds.

"Thank Heaven," iterated Miss Hunter, trying to look satisfied, "I have never experienced the reverse; the greatest flatterer of them all could never persuade me to resign my independence and become the slave of his capricious humour."

"Perhaps you are right, ladies," observed Mr. Radcliff, with a sigh. "Marriage is either a great happiness or a great curse, as the heart gives way to its passions and excesses, or exercises a wholesome control over them. But you, Lady Heartley, are the last woman," he continued, "from whom I should have expected such a reproach, having in yourself all that can create or constitute felicity."

No woman could resist so pretty a compliment, even from a man so old as Mr. Radcliff; and the countess repaid him by one of her most brilliant smiles.

At this moment, most of the visitors having arrived, the earl made his appearance, and cordially welcomed the two strangers, a circumstance which materially increased the curiosity of the party to learn their history; for Heartley was not the man to give his hand to a *parvenu*. Drawing Radcliff's arm within his, he nodded to his wife, and, bidding her do her best to entertain Fitzgerald, he descended with him to the library.

"Welcome, my dear Radcliff—a thousand times welcome on your return to England!" exclaimed his noble host, as soon as they were seated; "here is the official permission which restores to you your rights as an Englishman,—would I could add, to your rank and honours!"

His lordship gave to his visitor a parchment, sealed with the great seal of England.

"That," replied the old man, with a bitter smile, as he folded the document and placed it in his pocket-book, "thanks to the friendship of Walpole, is a hopeless wish; nevertheless, my lord, I thank you for it. Your last letter hastened my journey to London; it hinted of a secret of political importance. In what way can I serve you, or express my gratitude for the interest you have felt, and the trouble you must have taken, ere the Hanoverian despot could have been prevailed on to accord me the permission to breathe my native air?"

The speaker was no other than Richard Radcliff,

titular Earl of Derwentwater, whose elder brothers had sealed with their blood their fidelity to the unfortunate house of Stuart.

"Hush! my dear fellow," exclaimed the earl, with a smile; "no treason! You forget that I am a privy councillor, and that my party is in power; so nothing of that kind—for the present. But you have guessed rightly: strong as was my desire once more to see you, I had other motives in pressing your arrival. You know that I have some influence with the ministry; for my vote, although I am not an orator, is as valuable as Chatham's upon a division, added to which I return two members for my borough, and divide the county with the rascally Whigs. Hitherto a kind of compact has existed between the two parties that each should return his man; but we are strong enough now to throw the opposition member, and, *entre nous*, a dissolution must soon take place, and I know of no one who could so ably fill the seat as my old friend Radcliff. I know," he added, as he watched the flushed brow of his visitor, "how painful it would be to your feelings to descend to the lower house. But consider it merely as a stepping-stone to your family honours; in short, with your talents, influence with the remnant of your former party, it may lead to the consummation of your dearest wishes."

Radcliff had sufficient command over his temper to receive the proposition unmoved. Accustomed to read mankind, he at once traced the motives of his noble friend, and weighed the possible result of the plausible offer, which, after a few moments' reflection, he decided on refusing; yet, if possible, without breaking with the earl, whose interest might possibly be hereafter of service to his grandson, in whom the last hopes of his life and race were centred, and who had been educated for the career he declined himself to run.

"Has the minister authorised this plan, Heartley," he demanded, "or is it only the suggestion of your own kindly feelings?"

"Why, not exactly," replied the peer; "that is to say, not exactly authorised it. I need not, I trust, profess my attachment to the house of Derwentwater, or my desire to see its ancient honours restored in your person; but the times are trying alike to the minister and the sovereign,—they cannot afford to give back the possessions which circumstances have unhappily given them, without an equivalent, and that equivalent must be political influence. These are the very words of the premier when urged by your friends to a more ample measure of grace, which, while they hold no direct promise, leave room for future hope. I know the ousting of the obnoxious member would be particularly agreeable to government; your name in the north would rally many of the oldest families to the hustings; nor can the expense be a consideration, for I have not to learn that my friend is rich, very rich, in spite of confiscation and attainder."

"And what steps have you taken," demanded his friend, "in pursuance of this plan?"

"None at present," replied his lordship; "of course I waited for your decision, not feeling authorised to compromise you by any declaration."

"You have acted prudently, my lord," said Radcliff; "for a few moments' reflection will, I think, convince you of the impracticability of the scheme. In the first place, I doubt if your interest, great as it undoubtedly is, will prove sufficient to carry two members. Your opponent is not only a man of talent, but of personal estimation. And many who are parties to the present arrangement, in the event of a contest, would be found against you; added to which, his approaching marriage must materially strengthen his interest."

"Marriage!" exclaimed the earl, with a look of uncomfortable anticipation; "with whom?"

"With the only child and heiress of Sir Henry Sedly."

Heartley looked blank at the intelligence, and inquired if it were certain.

"Undoubted," answered his friend. "My man of business is Sir Henry's agent; he excused himself from some delay of which I complained by pleading the hurry he was in to prepare the marriage settlements. Again, were I even returned, ministers, it is true, might count on an additional vote; but would not the advantage be more than counterbalanced by the distaste of their master? The young king—there, I have gulped it at last—is of a most suspicious disposition. You know the reluctance with which he acceded to the request of the premier for my pardon—as, in official language, it is called. I fear," he added, "that his hatred to his uncle—the butcher Cumberland, the bitter persecutor of my unhappy race—induced him to perform that act of grace more than an impulse of humanity or justice."

Radcliff's reasons were too weighty to be combatted, and the earl resolved, before he again pressed the offer, to ascertain personally the truth of the reported marriage; not that he doubted his friend, or supposed him capable of wilful misrepresentation for a single moment, but the union of the opposition member with the heiress of his hitherto stanch ally was a blow to his influence in the county which he was unwilling to believe. Making an arrangement for a further conference on the morrow, he left his old friend, hastened to the card-room to find Sir Henry Sedly, and receive from his lips a denial or confirmation of his fears.

Sir Henry was a country gentleman of the old school—a Tory, a high churchman, and an excellent shot. He would have thought as soon of denying his God as abandoning his party; and his word once given, either to friend or enemy, might be implicitly relied on. With such a man, circumlocution was unnecessary. The earl, therefore, as soon as the game was finished, drew him into a recess by the window, and frankly stated the report he had heard. The old gentleman as frankly stated it to be correct.

"The young folks love each other," he observed; "and as Bess"—he had named his daughter after his favourite mare—"is the only one whom Providence has left me, I could not find it in my heart to cross her inclination. I wish the fellow had been a Tory, though, with all my heart. Good family, eh, my lord?" he added; "excellent character. Nothing to urge against his honour?"

"Certainly not," replied his host, who was too honourable a man to assail even an enemy by slander; "your intended son-in-law's character is unimpeachable even by his most bitter opponent. But how will this affect our party? Sir Henry Sedly will never be the man to desert his principles."

This was uttered in a tone half doubtful, half confident.

The baronet coloured at the insinuation. Sir Walter Mowbray had just made the same. He answered somewhat prondly:

"Why, look you, my lord. I believe I was as well as yourself, privy to an arrangement by which the contests which beggared so many families, and disturbed the peace and fellowship of the county, were

for the future to be avoided; Whigs and Tories each returning their man. God knows we have had division enough; the last contest ruined poor Mellish, and broke up the best pack of fox-hounds in the country; and, if I am not mistaken, dipped pretty deeply elsewhere. No offence—I only speak from report. If the Whigs choose to return my son-in-law, well and good. I care not whom they return. But if they break their treaty, I'll muster my tenantry at the hustings, and vote against them, even though Bess's husband lose his seat. So I trust, my lord, we perfectly understand each other."

"Perfectly, my dear Sir Henry," replied the peer. "Do me not the injustice, for one moment, to suppose that I doubted the political integrity and consistency of my friend. The Whigs are not likely, I think, to give us any trouble. But ought we—I throw it out merely as a hint—to permit them to return even one member? We are stronger than we were, and ——"

"Look you, Heartley," interrupted the baronet. "I will tell you my mind freely, in order that there may be no misunderstanding between us. After the last election, which ruined the oldest family in the county, I became a party to the present arrangement. Your lordship, being a peer, could take no share personally in it; but your friends, and, amongst others, myself, with your full concurrence, responded for you. An obligation is not the less binding that it is unattested by oath or parchment; rather the more so, for it is written indelibly on the heart of every honest man. Therefore the party which first violates the compact I hold foresworn, and will throw the balance of my interest against them."

"But, my dear fellow," remonstrated his lordship, his visions of *two* members vanishing into air, "in such a case what would you do—vote for the Whigs?"

"Vote for the devil!" ejaculated Sir Henry. "No, no; in such a case I should stand neuter. Not a tenant of mine should vote; and without arrogating too much, I think I hold the balance in my own hands. If, therefore, the Whigs break the truce, you will find me at the hustings. If the Tories forfeit their word, I leave them to fight their own battles, which I think they are too wise to undertake without me."

Mortifying as the opinion was, it was too true to be disputed, and the earl felt that it would be most politic to disavow any serious intention of disturbing the peace of the county. Here the subject dropped.

Many were the visions that floated through the brain of Radcliff, as with his grandson he rode to his quiet dwelling in a less fashionable part of the town. The past honours of his house, its feudal greatness, its vast possessions, swept across his imagination in proud but painful imagery.

"It is strange," he said, half muttering his thoughts aloud, "that one of my race should receive as a favour permission to breathe the air of England—to tread upon the soil that gave him birth—that holds the ashes of his ancestors. Nature's revolutions, which uproot the mountain and displace the valley, are not more terrible than man's. Who could have dreamt that when James, at my ancestor's intercession, elevated the family of Heartley to the peerage, the last male descendant of his name would owe the privilege to tread his native land to their influence? No matter," he added moodily; "the game was gallantly played, though lost."

Fitzgerald, who had caught a portion of his grandfather's soliloquy, saw that something had occurred, and demanded if he had received any unpleasant intelligence from the earl.

"Unpleasant!" iterated the old man. "Why, no; the Hanoverian usurper has at last accorded me formal permission to reside in England. In other words," he added bitterly, "I am pardoned."

"Then," exclaimed Gerald, his eyes flashing fire, "you are again Earl of Derwentwater."

"Not so," resumed his grandfather, "not so; the honours of my house are still attainted. Its possessions are too rich to be disgorged by the vultures who have fattened on them—but *you* may live to wring them from the oppressors."

"Poor lad!" said Radcliff, with a sigh, as his grandson left the library, after bidding him good night, on their return home, "lost as I am to human weakness, human sympathy, I can feel for thee. It is not thus the heir of my line should have been reared, to calculate like a plodding mechanic the chances of the world. Well, well, he who cannot command success must with cool head and patient labour win it. If the sacrifice of every feeling sacred to nature be a crime, let the penalty fall on those who have rendered the road of the fox the only path to retaliation. It is worth the sacrifice," he continued, as his eye glanced proudly on the genealogy of his house suspended against the wall of the apartment; "could I but feel assured that Fortune would requite the debt she owes me in the person of my grandson, in the exaltation of that boy, I should not care how soon my race was run. I could then descend to my grave, forgiving and forgetful of the past. No—not forgetful—not forgetful."

The stern old Jacobite threw himself into his well-cushioned chair, and endeavoured to compose his mind by reading.

The spirit of ambition which had been so carefully implanted in Fitzgerald's breast by the lessons of his grandfather, gathered strength as he traversed the crowded streets of the metropolis—gazed upon the magnificent edifices, or innumerable equipages. He was about to proceed to Cambridge—the honours of the university being the first step in the career which his aged relative had marked out for him. Although ambitious, his was not the ambition of a vulgar mind, or likely to be pursued by dishonourable means; the solitude in which he had lived had neutralised the power of the old Jacobite's lessons.

"Yes," said Gerald, as with a proud eye he gazed upon the edifice which the master-spirits of the age adorned by their eloquence, and where the interests of the world are discussed—"yes, life has still its purposes, ambition its reward. To rule, to balance the destiny of a mighty people, to direct the stream of intelligence and wealth, to be looked up to as the arbiter of a nation's fate, is indeed to live. Great ones of the earth," he added, "I will yet live to hold my place amongst you."

With these and similar reflections the young enthusiast quitted the neighbourhood of Westminster, and directed his way to the Tower, anticipating a melancholy pleasure in beholding a place which had been so fatal to his race. He paused at the gloomy archway under which his great-uncles had passed, after condemnation, to the scaffold. In imagination he beheld the headsman and his victims; a feeling of sickness and disgust came over him, and he turned hastily from the spot.

CHAPTER III.

Frolic, fun, and worldly knowledge,
Not classic lore, are taught in college.
College Life.

A FEW days saw Fitzgerald quietly ensconced in his room in the great court of Trinity College, Cambridge—his books comfortably arranged, and his gyp civil and attentive. His mornings were generally devoted to the libraries or exercise, his evenings to light, useful reading. A short time convinced him of the inutility of attending further than the discipline of the university enjoined the dull lectures of the professors, to many of whom he could have given instruction. Hitherto he had made no acquaintance beyond the mere civilities of the hall, for he wisely resolved not to present his letters of introduction until he had made himself acquainted with the habits and characters of those to whom they were addressed; he did not even make an exception of the one to William Pitt, which Lord Chatham had sent him through his grandfather. By some he was regarded as a studious fellow, by others as an affected recluse. His first introduction into society was effected in the following way. He was leisurely walking on the banks of the Cam, admiring the gorgeous architecture and imposing appearance of King's College Chapel, when a party of young bloods, who recognised him as a freshman, thought to amuse themselves at his expense.

"Stay, sir!" exclaimed one, a youth wearing a nobleman's gown, "where's your cap? No respect to the heads of the university? Have you long been up?"

"About ten days," replied Fitzgerald, taken by surprise, and not at first comprehending the jest.

"Too long to be excused," answered the youth. "Your cap, sir! Do you not perceive I am an officer of the university?"

"Indeed I do not," said our hero, who now saw through the affair; "but it is because you have laid aside your more appropriate badge of office."

"And what is that, sir?"

"The bells as well as cap."

This sally raised a laugh at the expense of the jester, who ill brooked a repartee where he expected an easy victory.

"You imagine yourself a wit, sir," he observed, with a sneer. "Is it long since you left your father's counter?"

"Longer," said our hero, proudly, "than, judging from your boyish impertinence, you have left the school-room. But I have no time to quarrel; you are unworthy the chastisement of a man, and your gown screens you from that due to the rudeness of a boy. Let me pass."

This conversation had taken place at the foot of the bridge which connects the meadows with the lawn in front of the college. As Fitzgerald spoke he attempted to pass, but his assailant, annoyed at the sarcasm and the laugh of his companions, rashly laid his hand upon his collar. To seize the youth by the shoulders, and suspend him over the stream, was the work of an instant, for Gerald felt incensed. Ascertaining that the water was too shallow to run any risk of drowning his aggressor, he quietly dropped him into the Cam, and resumed his walk.

"Excellent!" exclaimed a voice near him. Our hero turned, and beheld a young man in a fellow commoner's cap and gown. "You served the puppy rightly. But I hope the water is not deep."

"No," replied Fitzgerald, as the youth climbed up the side of the bank from his cold bath. "There is no danger of the fool drowning. I ascertained that before I dropped him in."

"Your card, sir," demanded the infuriated young man, who, with his friends, approached the spot where Fitzgerald and the stranger were standing.

It was given.

"It is well. I shall report to the vice-chancellor your infamous attempt upon my life."

"You may report what you please," replied our hero, coolly; "only remember that a falsehood will call for a severer chastisement than the one you have already received."

"And remember, Moreton," said the stranger, "that I witnessed the whole affair. Adieu! Upon my honour, you swim capitally!"

Drawing Gerald's arm through his, they left the party to make what further comments they thought fit.

"Do you know that impertinent coxcomb?" demanded the stranger.

"Not I," said his companion; "but from his gown I perceive that he is a nobleman—a pretty specimen of a future legislator. His impertinence was perfectly gratuitous. I never gave him the slightest cause. Should his lordship carry his threat into execution, you will, perhaps, trouble yourself to witness for me?"

"Willingly; but I have a shrewd suspicion the affair will go no further, unless by way of challenge. Have you ever fought?"

"Never," responded Fitzgerald, not altogether pleased at the idea of a duel. "I have hitherto made war only on the chamois and bears of Switzerland."

During their walk through the college grounds, our freshman's unknown companion amused him by describing the various characters as they passed, to most of whom he was personally known.

"Cap!" he cried, "here comes the Bishop of Bristol and master of your college, whose orthodoxy is as unimpeachable as his gastronomy. Indeed, it would be difficult to say for which he is most renowned. That dignitary following him is Powell, master of John's. Observe how superciliously he notices the salute of the sizar in a rusty gown. The youth he is now bowing to is William Pitt, son of the minister. What humility! what affability! he will wear the mitre yet. His last sermon against the dissenters made him Archdeacon of Colchester."

The bitter humour of his companion pleased our hero, and he treasured up his observations.

"You are severe," he said; "has he no virtues to redeem his prejudices?"

"Virtues!" repeated the stranger. "Oh, yes—a thousand at least; his heirs will find them to grave upon his tomb. He hates a Catholic; but then, to make amends, he loves a lord. He gives sumptuous dinners to the rich; and prays, sir,—prays heartily for the poor. He has charities too, doubtless; but then they are so private the world never hears of them, or those who know him best suspect them. But what of this?" he added; "he will rest under a marble tomb, and a sermon will be preached to commemorate his virtues."

"Here," exclaimed the cynic, as they encountered a party of ladies who were attended by several gownsmen, "are more characters for you! They are the widow and daughters of the late Professor Plumb—coquettes and flirts angling for lovers. That right-hand youth is the nephew and heir of the Duke of

Hareland. You must rival your groom in vulgarity, and your gyp in obscenity, if you wish to become his friend. The eldest girl is just now acting the hoyden to attract him. With Lovelace she was all sentiment last year; quoted Pope, and learnt the guitar. The second lordling—for they are both noble—is as proud of his honours as he is unworthy of them. Ignorant even for a peer, he despises learning in a man of rank, but has an idea that Latin is very proper for a curate. He is so perfectly satisfied with his own little importance in the world, that he is content to remain ignorant of all besides. Gain his friendship, and ten to one but you are rivalled in his esteem by his valet or his groom."

The young men pursued their walk for some time in silence.

"May I venture to demand whose acquaintance I have had the honour of making?" inquired Fitzgerald, at last breaking silence.

His companion stared at him. "I perceive you are a freshman," he replied; "we never ask or give names at Cambridge unless we intend to fight; you may sup with a man in a chum's room at night, and cut him in the morning. But for once," he added, observing the flush on the brow of his new friend, who thought he wanted to shirk the acquaintance, "I will break the rule. My name is, as you will perceive by the card, Harry Digby. And now, as the proctor would say, name and college, sir?"

Fitzgerald gave his card in return.

"Ah! umph! Fitzgerald! a good name! I thought there was something aristocratic in your face. The family, I think, is Irish?"

"My father was of Ireland, but, long before my birth, had expatriated himself, and served in the armies of the King of France."

The misfortunes which had overwhelmed so many noble families during the political struggles of 1715 and 1745 were still fresh in the memory of many, and it had become a positive rule in society to abstain from all remark, whenever, by accident, the conversation led to the forbidden subject. Digby, therefore, who, though possessing much eccentricity of manner, was, in every sense of the word, a gentleman, immediately changed the theme.

Fitzgerald, in turn, was puzzled with his new companion. There was a congenial expression in his countenance which repaid confidence. He knew, and was evidently known to, most of the parties they encountered. His inveteracy against the aristocracy was so invariably severe, that our hero would have taken him for a democrat of the lower class, had he not remembered that he had seen his name in the calendar, and that he was the grandson and nephew of a peer.

"You have seen the menagerie," exclaimed Digby, as they entered Neville's Court from the gardens; "and now tell me, Mr. Fitzgerald, to which of the lions shall I introduce you? I owe you some reparation for having forced myself on your acquaintance."

"Truly your method of payment is most novel," replied our hero. "Think you that I am a tuft-hunter? No, your descriptions are so graphic, I seek not an introduction to the originals. If I cannot find men more worthy of being known, I will e'en rest satisfied with my old companions—books: they will neither debauch my mind nor vitiate my heart."

"Umph!" said the cynic, half relaxing his habitual sneer; "and when tired of them, what will you do?—turn philosopher, and rail at the follies of mankind?"

"No," replied Gerald, "I will rather endeavour to amend them."

"We must be friends," exclaimed Digby, who was pleased with the reply. "Nay, man, I am not so cynical as I appear. Hitherto I have worn a mask with thee, as well as with the world; but I can discard it."

"Pray then do," said our hero, smiling; "for the acid of your speech, whether affected or real, curdles every sentiment of kindness. You are enough, not only to make a man despise the world, but abhor himself. You see I am plain with you; I am country-bred, and unskilled in the unnatural courtesies of fashionable life. If ever," he continued, "I form a friendship, it must be with one whose head and heart will bear the truth. I can neither flatter nor be flattered."

"And I," replied Digby, "alike abhor the cringing reptile, who would prostrate the dignity of independence at the shrine of vanity and vulgar rank. You have guessed truly. There are men in the university worthy of being known. Come, you shall dine with me to-day. No denial. I will present you to a few whom I think worthy of your notice."

The invitation was too frankly given to be refused; added to which, Fitzgerald felt disposed to see something more of his new acquaintance.

At dinner, the young freshman encountered William Pitt, whose intimacy, from the celebrity of his father, as well as his own growing reputation, he felt disposed to cultivate. A young Scotch nobleman, Lord Linton, very prosy, very pedantic, and extremely inclined to inflict his tediousness upon any one who would endure it. Several others, chiefly reading-men, were of the party, which passed off as college parties generally do, with the exception, perhaps, of a little less dissipation. It was past midnight when Fitzgerald entered his college.

"Past gate hour," growled the porter, as he unbolted the gate; "I don't know what the tutor will say; that is, I don't know what he would say," added the fellow, as the student slipped a guinea quietly in his hand. "The gate bill is made up. All right, sir. Good night."

On the following morning, according to promise, Digby breakfasted with his new friend.

"If a parvenu," he thought to himself as he glanced round the elegant apartment, "he is at least a rich one, and possessed of taste too."

The fact is, there were no better rooms in college than Fitzgerald's.

They were scarcely seated when Lord Harry Heartley's card was brought in by the gyp.

"How!" said Digby, "are you acquainted with Heartley, the most dissipated fellow of his college?"

"A mere visit of ceremony. I have never seen him; but my grandfather and the earl are friends."

As he spoke, the young lordling entered, and after nodding to Digby, made one of those common-place observations which generally usher in a first introduction.

"By the bye," observed his lordship, coming to the real purport of his visit, "you had rather a ridiculous affair with Moreton. Served him right, on my honour; the fellow, *entre nous*, is an ass. I began to get tired of his acquaintance. He must have looked decidedly ridiculous as he crawled up the bank out of the Cam. Quite raised your name, I assure you. Fortunate thing Digby saw it, or it might have gone hard against you with the vice. The coxcomb wanted me to bring a challenge, but I refused—could

not very well, our governors being old friends, you know. I told him so, and advised him to apologise. Are you engaged? No, you must dine with me—no denial—asked a dozen entirely on your account."

Lord Harry was, indeed, a very fast young man, but kind-hearted, and thoroughly honourable withal. He hunted, kept his horses, dogs, valet, and monkey, and led the *mode*.

Fitzgerald found it impossible to excuse himself.

"You have so frequently refused to join us," continued his lordship, "that I shan't ask you again. We are not sage enough for you."

"For once, then," said Digby, smiling, "I will come, without being invited. Name your hour."

"At five, and wait for no man. But remember, no tea and philosophy; but claret, and a cool tankard. Do you know," he continued, "we think Moreton will apologise. He had been lunching with Osmond, and taken too much wine. Bad habit at lunch; spoils a man for dinner. The bath, however, sobered him. Ha! ha! ha!"

The rattling youngster walked to the window, which looked into the court.

"Osmond, by Jove!" he continued. "Which do you bet, Digby, peace or war? By the bye, I have capital pistols, Fitzgerald, at your service,—the same poor Howard was shot with, the best whip in the club; no ceremony, if you require them, only——"

His lordship's volubility was cut short by the entrance of Mr. Osmond, who fortunately was the messenger of peace. Lord Moreton acknowledged that he was in error in touching the collar of a gentleman whose acquaintance he had not the honour to possess, and pleaded wine as his excuse.

"Of course," continued the ambassador, "after such an explanation, Mr. Fitzgerald can have no hesitation in stating his regret at the manner in which he resented so slight an error?"

Our hero had listened to the apology with well-bred ease, but at the same time with the attention which evinced his consciousness that it was his due. The last demand, however, he was too clear-sighted not to see through. Lord Moreton, annoyed at the ridiculous position in which he was placed by the adventure, wished it to be understood that it had been arranged by a mutual apology—a scheme which Osmond had promised to accomplish.

"I can have no apology to offer for the circumstance to which you allude," said Gerald, in a somewhat sarcastic tone, but with much gentlemanly bearing; "but I have no objection to express my regret at the act of folly which called forth my resentment."

"Pretty stiff that!" muttered Lord Harry, who had a habit of making his comments aloud.

Osmond bit his lip with vexation, but remained silent.

Digby, pleased with his friend's line of conduct, said:

"Mr. Fitzgerald has acted quite correctly; and I am glad his lordship has had sufficient sense to pursue the most honourable course."

"You will find his lordship's acquaintance most desirable; not from his rank and interest," continued Mr. Osmond, with a half-satirical smile; "these are, of course, beneath Mr. Fitzgerald's consideration; but from his good qualities and companionable disposition. The late unpleasant affair being so amicably arranged, I am commissioned to express the pleasure which his lordship will feel in receiving you in his rooms."

This was an opportunity which few young men would have neglected, as Moreton was courted by half the university for his interest and wealth. It was not, however, by such means that our hero expected to retrieve the broken fortunes of his house. He received the intimation quietly, exhibiting neither emotion, surprise, or eagerness to secure the *entrée* into the most exclusive circle in the university.

"His lordship has my card," he answered coolly; "but should our slight and very accidental rencontre lead to an acquaintance, the visit must proceed from him."

"Ah!" thought Digby to himself, "this is no moth to flutter round the rushlight of nobility; but a fellow who knows his own value, and is determined to maintain his consequence; or is it, after all, a refined affectation of independence? Time will show."

Lord Harry and Osmond were evidently surprised at the reply, and the latter seriously annoyed, but it was given in a tone which prevented all reply.

"Very proper, very spirited, and all that sort of thing," exclaimed the former, as soon as the messenger had left the room; "but I am sorry you declined the invitation. Resenting an insult is one thing; declining a friendship another. The fellow might have been of use to you; he has a good heart, though somewhat deficient in the upper story—is a peer, although a fool. Do you really intend to reject his acquaintance?"

"That must depend on the manner in which it is proffered," replied our hero: "at present I shall neither seek nor avoid it."

"Avoid it?" repeated his lordship—"of course not. That would ill accord with your—hem!—I mean it would look like resentment; and as he has made the *amende honorable*—I—yes. By the bye, I'll ask him to join us at dinner; for, after all, he belongs to a pleasant set. What do you say, Mr. Fitzgerald?"

"Really, my dear Lord Harry, it is a subject upon which I have neither wish nor opinion."

"Well, well—I see. Moreton—Osmond," muttered the young lordling; "very proper—dine at five. Digby, leave your philosophy at home; claret, no tea; remember that, no tea."

The thoughtless but kind-hearted youth quitted the room with the same careless good humour with which he entered it.

No sooner were Digby and Fitzgerald left alone than the former began to pace the floor, evidently either disconcerted or annoyed; but whether with himself or others, it was difficult to guess. After a few moments his host exclaimed:

"Are you usually as amusing when you pay morning visits, or am I to consider myself as being particularly favoured?"

"I am vexed," replied Digby; "the fellow who has just left us I have hitherto considered a fool—pointedly rejected his attentions—have spoken of him as a mere sensualist, and yet I find he has a heart. I wish I had not offered to go to his dinner."

"Why so?"

"I fear being disgusted by some act of folly which will make me retract my good opinion."

"Cynic!" exclaimed our hero; "we shall meet at five."

At the appointed hour the party were assembled in the rooms of Lord Harry. Fitzgerald received the introduction to Lord Moreton with that easy indifference which, whilst it left nothing to complain of on the score of politeness, enraged the young noble, who had hitherto been accustomed to receive from his untitled fellow students that homage so flattering to little minds.

Lord Linton, Osmond, Pitt, Digby, and several others were at table. The dinner passed quietly enough, more wine was drank than did them good, and more professions made than ever were remembered.

"Of what family is Mr. Fitzgerald?" whispered Moreton to his host after the bottle had circulated freely.

Digby heard the question and listened anxiously for the reply.

"Hang his family," said Lord Harry, "I know nothing about it. He is a devilish good fellow, I can answer for that. His grandfather is a friend of the governor's, who wrote to me to be civil to him."

"A *parvenu*," whispered Osmond to the peer, who smiled assent.

"Are there many freshmen up, Pitt?" demanded Moreton of the future minister.

"Not that I am aware of," replied the young man, "but I lead so quiet a life. Mr. Fitzgerald," he added, is the only one I have had the honour of meeting."

"None of any rank, I dare say, or we should have known," observed Osmond.

"I beg your pardon, sir," exclaimed the young Scotch lord, "but two kinsmen of my ain are up—Charles and Ned Graham. I'd no advise ye, Mister Osmond, to rin them doun, if ye have ony discretion."

"And why not?" said the young man, haughtily. He had the reputation of being the best shot in the university. "For fear of your lordship's displeasure? I never yet feared to meet any man."

"You are na likely to meet me in that way," answered the wary Scot. "You are not exactly the sort of man I should accept a challenge from; but if you wish for a turn, either of the lads will oblige you. They have not practised in a gallery," he added, "to take the lives of their fellow creatures, but they dinna lack skill in bringing doun a black cock upon the hills. I shall be happy to introdnce ye to each other."

The serious manner in which the offer was made raised a laugh at the expense of the young dnellist, in which his friend Lord Moreton joined.

"Take the offer," exclaimed Pitt. "I'll bet on the Highlander."

"Perhaps," said Osmond, with a sneer, looking towards Linton, "they may partake of their noble kinsman's objection."

"Little fear of that," observed Fitzgerald; "Highlanders seldom lack courage on such occasions.

"You speak as if you were a Highlander," retorted the young man to Mr. Fitzgerald—"of a Scotch family," he added, with a sneer.

"No," answered our hero, coolly, "but of a northcountry one, and sufficiently connected with Scotland to respect the character and courage of her sons. And now permit me to ask, of what family is Mr. Osmond?"

"Of Corbridge," replied the young man, haughtily, —"not quite unknown."

Fitzgerald was indeed surprised; Corbridge was the name of a seat and village formerly the property of the Derwentwaters; and Osmond was the name of the steward of the fallen family, who had contrived to enrich himself at their expense, and even to purchase of the commissioners to whom the estates had been granted the place in question.

"Formerly, I think, the property of the Derwentwater family."

The young man bowed with an assumption of dignity, it was evident he had the weakness to wish it to be understood that he was connected with that noble but unfortunate race—a belief universal amongst the party.

"Come, come," cried Lord Harry, "what's all this stuff about family? We are all descended from Adam. Leave genealogies to heralds. Pass the bottle."

"Pardon me," said Osmond, who had come determined to pick a quarrel, "but I cannot permit any insult to my family to pass unnoticed. Your friend must apologise, or——"

"I thought it would come to this," muttered Digby.

Every one looked upon Fitzgerald, whose eyes flashed fire; but, although excited with wine, he had sufficient control over himself to answer his antagonist calmly.

"Apology to you, Mr. Osmond, is quite out of the question."

"Then, sir, I shall expect the satisfaction due to my rank and name."

"You shall have it," replied our hero, fixing on him a glance of contempt, "as soon as I can procure a horsewhip to discharge the debt."

In an instant all was confusion. Osmond seized a decanter, and would have sent it at the head of his antagonist, had not Lord Harry prevented him. Pitt and Digby stood aloof, quiet spectators of the scene. As soon as silence was restored, their host was the first to speak.

"Really, Mr. Fitzgerald," he began, "horsewhip is not the reply to meet the challenge of a gentleman, surely?"

"Shameful!" exclaimed Lord Moreton, in which he was chorussed by his friends.

"Gentlemen," said our hero, "you shall decide for me. What other reply could I make to the son of my grandfather's steward, when I found him not only impudently thrusting himself into your society, but assuming a right to vindicate the name and honour of my family?"

Had a thunderbolt at that moment fallen into the room, it could not have more astonnded the party than did this declaration.

"Your family!" repeated Lord Harry; "why certainly your grandfather's name is Radcliff, but I never understood that—hem!"

"I trust, my lord, I am not doubted, when I state that my grandfather is Richard Radcliff, titular Earl of Derwentwater. Mr. Osmond has acknowledged himself to be of Corbridge, by which circumstance I know him to be the son of a former servant of my family and one Jane Hewson, an illegitimate daughter of the late earl. However, that there may be no doubt of my position with respect to the unfortunate family alluded to, perhaps Mr. Pitt will condescend to vouch for me."

As he spoke, he presented the letter of the minister to his son. All eyes were fixed on Pitt while perusing his father's letter. After carefully reading it and placing it in his pocket-book, he cordially extended his hand to our hero, and said:

"Mr. Fitzgerald, I am happy to make your acquaintance; my father writes highly of you. Well, gentlemen," he continued, "I presume you do not require my evidence to corroborate my friend's assertion?"

"Perhaps," exclaimed Digby with a sneer, "the high-born Mr. Osmond will require some further evi-

The young man alluded to, who appeared like one stunned at the declaration, cast a look of hate around and quitted the room.

"Had ye no better take your pedigree with you?" roared Lord Linton, as Osmond went out at the door. "He will sport na mair borrowed feathers here—the daw is fairly plucked. Gie us your hand, mon," he said, turning to Fitzgerald; "I am glad for your ain sake ye are weel born! We ought to be friends—my father was out in '45."

"And fell?" demanded Digby.

"No," said the Scotchman, drily; "he did better—he came back again. As for that fellow——"

"My friend," interrupted Moreton, "and I'll not hear him insulted. He claimed not specific relationship with the Derwentwaters. His birth is no disgrace to him, at least in my opinion."

"But as you are na the pope, your judgment is not infallible. To my thinking, his birth is the fule's misfortune. There can be but one opinion of his conduct, I am thinking."

"Certainly not! Ungentlemanly! An impostor!" exclaimed several who had been annoyed by the air which Osmond at times indulged in.

Lord Moreton bowed stiffly to Lord Harry, and quitted the room.

"Exit Lord Moreton," said Digby.

"Knight of the Bath," echoed another, in allusion to his affair with Fitzgerald.

His lordship heard the words as he was descending the stairs, and returned absolutely trembling with rage.

"Who has presumed," he demanded, "to make allusion to that ruffianly transaction?"

"It was I, lad," said the Scot with provoking coolness.

"Psha! you are beneath my notice!" said Moreton, turning to leave the room.

"Stay, sir!" interposed Fitzgerald; "you just now used an expression which demands an explanation—ruffianly transaction. It would be affectation not to understand the affair to which you allude. Whom do you accuse of ruffianism? Surely not the man to whom you sent a voluntary apology?"

"Which I was a fool to do, and which I here withdraw," answered his lordship. "And if I may presume to consider myself as the equal of the Derwentwaters, I shall expect from you the satisfaction which

your rank prevented you from affording Mr. Osmond."

"You have my card," replied his antagonist, coolly. "It would be bad taste to discuss the affair further here. I shall be honoured in hearing from your lordship."

Fitzgerald resumed his seat; and Lord Moreton, with a look of haughty defiance, immediately left the room.

"Upon my honour, a very pleasant dinner party!" exclaimed Lord Harry; "this comes of trying to make people friends!"

The good fellowship of the evening had been too rudely broken in upon to be restored. Despite every effort to sustain it, conversation gradually flagged, and the party soon broke up.

Fitzgerald and Digby accompanied Pitt towards Pembroke, where he resided.

"You will require a friend in this affair," observed the latter; "I detest duelling, but in this instance I am at your service."

"Pardon me," interposed their companion, "but I claim the right of offering my services to Mr. Fitzgerald."

Our hero expressed his thanks, assuring them that their assistance and advice would be of the utmost value to him, as he was totally ignorant of the usages on such an occasion.

"How!" exclaimed Pitt, in surprise, "why in the first affair Heartley asserted that you were a crack shot?"

"With my gun perhaps I have some little skill," replied Fitzgerald, "but to the best of my recollection I never once even fired a pistol."

"The greater the necessity for having some one to take care of you. There is frequently as foul play in a duel as in the dice-box," said Pitt. "Will you give us breakfast in the morning?"

"With pleasure—name your hour?"

"Ten."

With this the three young men parted to their respective colleges. That night our hero slept less soundly than usual.

Scarcely had our hero and his two friends finished breakfast the following morning, than Osmond made his appearance; not as on the former occasion, the ambassador of peace, but for the purpose of demanding a hostile meeting on the part of Lord Moreton.

Fitzgerald was about to reply, when Digby checked him.

"As the friend of Mr. Fitzgerald," said Pitt, coldly, "I must decline receiving any message through Mr. Osmond."

"On what pretence am I objected to as the friend of Lord Moreton?" demanded the young man, pale with passion.

"Not that your father raised himself from the station of a dependant," replied Pitt, sternly, "or from the circumstance of your mother's birth; but for having meanly insinuated the falsehood you feared openly to assert; for having assumed the honours of my friend's family, to which you have neither claim nor connection. If Lord Moreton wishes his message to meet with fitting attention, he must select another channel of communicating it. You have my answer."

"Then, sir, I shall feel myself called upon to advise my friend's posting Mr. Fitzgerald as a coward, considering the reason you allege as a mere subterfuge."

"And I," resumed Pitt, "in such case shall advise my friend first to publish a refutation of the slander, and then inflict personal chastisement on the author. As it is impossible we should hold further converse, you will oblige me by ending the interview."

The disappointed messenger withdrew, deeply mortified at the result of his visit.

"My dear fellow," said Digby, "what were you about to do? Are you not aware that in a duel you must even speak by proxy—that you entrust your friend with your honour, and must pull a trigger or not, as he shall decide?"

"A thousand pardons!" said our hero; "I feel I could not entrust my honour in better hands; but are we obliged to lose this beautiful morning on the mere possibility of his lordship finding a more fitting messenger?"

"I think we may venture in the grounds," said Pitt, "leaving word with the gyp where we are to be found."

During their walk, the affair of the preceding night was discussed.

"Lord Harry," observed Digby, "behaved remarkably well; and yet I do not wish to see more of him."

"And why?" demanded Pitt.

"Because I fear being disgusted by some fresh act of folly on his part, which will obliterate the impression I have received—such is the sad inconsistency of human nature. I have almost come to the resolution to avoid for the future the acquaintance of every man who bears the stamp either of virtue or genius, lest association should destroy the ideal—the perfection I worship. Indeed, I should long ere this have carried my resolve into execution, but have been deterred by the consideration that it will reduce me to solitude, or companionship only with the light and frivolous."

"And even amongst them," observed Pitt, "you would find traces, where you least expect them, of the divine portion of our nature. 'Tis rare that you find man so debased you cannot find something which savours of a better state. Eden was not forgotten with the fall."

"True," said Digby; "but remembered only to be regretted, as the glimpses of virtue which appear in man lead us to draw comparisons between what he is and what he might be. Why," he exclaimed, with increasing energy, "why will man continue to render his reason—his virtue—the god-like principles of his nature, a sacrifice to the idols of passion and interest? How different the world might be! 'Tis vice which degrades it from paradise to hell!"

"Was Utopia the subject of your last theme?" demanded Fitzgerald, with a smile; "if so, dismiss it. The Greek philosopher, whose imagination, dazzled by the Egyptian chimera, first transplanted it to Europe, lived to see its impracticability. Why revive it? Adhere to your old character of cynic; it is more amusing, and has this advantage, that you will never lack subjects to support it."

"I dare say you are right," replied Digby, who was in one of his melancholy humours, "but pray do not labour to convince me that you are so. If my views are visionary, I am happy in them. Time will destroy them soon enough. It is our present artificial system of education," he added, which degrades the natural character of mankind—our miscalled civilisation, which, creating a thousand artificial wants and pursuits, leads us into a thousand meannesses and vices to gratify them. If ever I have a son, I will educate him on the principles of equality and virtue, teach him to reject every gratification virtue does not sanction, and then ——"

"Shut him up in a monastery, I should hope," interrupted Fitzgerald; "for he would be unfit for the world, defenceless against its snares and ills. No, no—where all have talons and beaks, rely upon it, it *is necessary to have talons and beaks too.* I have been the victim of a system of education. My grandfather's desire was to see me learned; to cram me with the knowledge of my fellow-creatures — not their virtues, but their weaknesses; to study mankind, that I might wield their destinies; in short, to make a statesman of me. For this end all indulgence was invariably refused me—every thing calculated to excite my ambition placed before me; and when he found that his unnatural discipline had destroyed my health, he gave up his scheme as Utopian and absurd."

Pitt listened to the speaker with deep interest, but was silent; not so Digby, who thought, and perhaps truly, that he had obtained at last the key to his companion's character.

"Tell me," he demanded, "have all his lessons failed? Does no throbbing of ambition disturb the dream of your existence?"

The peculiar tone in which the last words were conveyed annoyed Fitzgerald, who inwardly censured the unguarded frankness which had led him to such a confession; but he was too much master of himself to suffer either regret or confusion to be visible.

"Why," he replied, with a smile, whose placid expression might have disarmed suspicion's self, "if power fell in my way I would not kick it out of the path; but till it does, my ambition will neither spoil my digestion nor give me the spleen. I am neither insensible to honourable advancement, nor so mad as dishonourably to pursue it. The wild dreams of my instructor have left little impression on my mind beyond the consciousness of their absurdity."

"Still you do remember them," said Digby; for the conversation had made a powerful impression upon him; it having been one of his favourite theories that character is formed by education, and by education alone, and that early impressions, whether for good or evil, shaded the path of life.

His speculations were, however, cut short by the approach of a Mr. Howard, who advanced evidently with the intention of addressing them.

"A thousand pardons, Digby, but I can't allow you to pass. May I request an introduction to your friend?"

It was given, and the gentlemen bowed themselves into an acquaintance.

"I regret, Mr. Fitzgerald, that my first interview should place me, perchance, in an unfavourable light with you, for I am the bearer of a message from my friend Lord Moreton. I accepted the unpleasant offer in the hope of being able to arrange matters amicably between you."

"The direction of the affair is in my hands," said Pitt. "I represent Mr. Fitzgerald; what are your commands?"

The hostile message of the morning was repeated.

"Certainly," said Pitt, "my friend can have no objection to meet his lordship, now that he has selected a man of honour as his second. What are the proposed arrangements?"

"Pistols, of course," was the reply.

It was finally agreed that the parties should apply for leave of absence, and meet in London the second day of the ensuing week—an arrangement necessary to avoid expulsion, the penalty awarded by the university for duelling within the precincts.

"Come," said Pitt, "no time must be lost in seeing the vice. Digby, you had better wait at my rooms. Fitzgerald and you must dine with me to-day. Should we go three together, the old boy might suspect something."

The dignitary was fortunately in college. The son of the prime minister had no difficulty of access. The friends found him reproving a poor devil of a sizar summoned before him for absenting himself without leave, and for which he was threatening him with expulsion, but the arrival of visitors caused him to be dismissed with a hasty reprimand.

The introduction of Fitzgerald was graciously received, and the health of the minister most punctiliously inquired after.

"With the cares of a kingdom," observed the vice, "heaven knows he must have enough to think about. I assure you that even my office, though light in comparison, is any thing but a sinecure; I am nearly fagged to death. You saw that sizar whom I dismissed, perhaps too leniently—three days absent from college without leave—indeed, leave refused—a sick mother, or some such excuse. I would have expelled him, but as the tale was not altogether a falsehood I have only suspended his scholarship."

Fitzgerald felt fidgetty during this harangue, convinced that there was but little chance of the permission being granted; but he little knew the influence of his companion. How great the difference between the application of the son of the prime minister for leave for a few days' pleasure, and that of a poor sizar to visit a sick mother!

"Speaking of leave," said Pitt, coolly, "I have to request permission for myself and friend for a week; I have to meet my father in town, and hate travelling alone."

"Certainly," said the doctor, with a smile; "when do you return?"

"Thursday or Saturday."

They had scarcely walked a dozen yards from the master's lodge when they encountered Moreton and Howard. The parties saluted each other stiffly.

"On the same errand," whispered Fitzgerald.

"Doubtless," replied his companion; "the vice is too politic to offend a peer; added to which, Moreton is not the fellow to heed a prohibition. Is it not a bore," he continued, "to be subject to the pompous civilities of such crouching sycophants; to be treated little better than children by men whom, in our reflective moments, we despise?"

The three friends were scarcely seated at dinner in Pitt's room, when Lord Linton presented himself, much to their annoyance, for the fellow was as prosy as he was selfish and sarcastic.

"Weel!" he exclaimed, "but ye managed it cleverly! The vice has given permission for a week's absence. Only see what it is to be the son of a minister! He nearly rusticated a poor devil of a sizar who went to see his sick mother. Poor people have no right to be sick. The vice is a cunning chield," continued his lordship, shaking his thick skull, and chuckling with delight.

"Really, Lord Linton," said Pitt, "you have the jest to yourself. Pray let us share it, if it be worth the having."

"Worth the having!" iterated the Scot. "May the deil fly away with me if its no——"

"Most devoutly I wish he would," cried Digby, "unless you condescend to be intelligible."

"I consider it," resumed Linton, addressing himself to Pitt, for Digby's last speech displeased him, "as fine a piece of diplomacy as ony your father ever played; and that's saying much. A simple fellow like myself, would have said at once, 'I'll no fight;' but you, canny bird, make the arrrangements, get permission to quit, and then secretly inform the vice of the whole affair, that he may issue a prohibition. Upon my honour," he added, with a satirical grin, "it was bravely planned."

"What mean you?" demanded Pitt, starting from his seat.

"Bravo! yon'll make a rare speaker! Garrick himself could not have acted it better."

"Lord Linton," continued Pitt, "if we are to remain friends—if I am not to consider this visit as a premeditated insult, tell me at once what you allude to."

There was a sternness in the speaker's tone which admonished the peer it would be dangerous to trifle. He briefly replied, that an interdict had been left at Moreton's rooms in his absence; that on hearing of it he had jumped into a post-chaise, and started for London.

"Of course," added his lordship, "you have received one also. Osmond openly oxpressed his opinion you had given the information to avoid a meeting for your friend."

"Contemptible scoundrel! he is, I doubt not, himself the author of the treachery; but wo shall disappoint him."

"You must be qnick, then," cried Digby, who was near the window, "for here comes the officer with the injunction."

"Quick!" exclaimed Pitt; "sport the door—drop the blind—keep the fellow at bay while Fitzgerald and I get through my bed-room window; it opens into the fellows' garden, and I have a key of the private gate."

The manœuvre was successful; they escaped the officer, and Osmond's scheme of casting a donbt upon the courage of Fitzgerald was baffled.

The merning after their arrival in London, the contending parties met at the usual duelling rendezvons at the back of Montagne House. Lord Moreton was too inveterate, and our hero too well satisfied with his own condnct, to admit of an accommodation. The seconds proceeded to measure the ground and examine the pistols. Moreton and Fitzgerald took their stations, and, upon a given signal, fired—the former at his antagonist, the latter into the air.

The seconds advanced.

"You are aware," said Pitt, "that my friend fired in the air. I presnme his lordship is satisfied?"

After a few minntes' conversation with his principal, Mr. Howard retnrned with an embarrassed air.

His lordship insisted on another fire.

"It is unusual amongst men of honour," exclaimed Pitt, "after an adversary has discharged his pistol in the air; a point upon which I need not appeal to Mr. Howard's judgment."

The gentleman hesitated. He had not seen Mr. Fitzgerald's fire. Of course he did not doubt the word of his friend; but as Lord Moreton denied his having fired in the air, he felt bound to press the demand.

"The fellow demands another fire," said Pitt to his friend.

Fitzgerald looked surprised.

"I know," continued Pitt, "that it is the custom amongst men of honour to press these affairs no further when one of the parties fires in the air; but his lordship denies your having done so, and demands——"

"Pray oblige his lordship," said our hero, with great coolness; "I have not the least objection."

"It shall be on one condition, then—that you promise to aim at him. I will not see you murdered if can help it."

"He has forfeited all further consideration," replied Fitzgerald; "I shall do my best."

The combatants again took their places, and fired. Moreton was wonnded in the fleshy part of his right arm; his antagonist remained erect.

"It is nothing," exclaimed the incensed peer; "I can raise a pistol once more—another fire." He attempted to lift the discharged weapon, but was obliged to let it fall through pain and weakness. It was impossible for the affair to proceed any fnrther.

"So," said Howard, "the affair being finished, you have no objection, I presume, to your friend shaking hands with my principal?"

"Every objection," replied Pitt; "after his lordship's vindictive conduct, they can never meet bnt as strangers."

Mr. Howard colonred, for the reply conveyed, he thought, an indirect censnre upon himself.

"Of course," he continued, "you will not hesitate to declare that Moreton conducted himself like a man of honour and courage?"

"Of courage, certainly. Whether his lordship has gained much honour by the affair, the world will judge."

The parties left the ground, Howard assisting his friend to his carriage.

"Home," cried Pitt to the post-boy, as soon as he and Fitzgerald were seated.

"Stop at a surgeon's by the way," said our hero.

"Good God! are you wounded?"

"Slightly; but I was determined that fellow should not see it. The ball has glanced near the ribs; but I apprehend the wound is slight."

The chaise stopped at the house of a medical man, who easily extracted the ball, assuring Fitzgerald that he need be under no alarm, for that a few days of repose and quiet would enable him to return to college.

CHAPTER IV

Jnstice sleeps not, although her eyes are bonnd;
Jnstice limps not, although her foot is slow;
She draws the sword in silence and in shade,
And when crime deems itself the most secure,
Strikes the avenging blow.—*Catiline.*

On the same morning that the duel was fought, Prim, the lawyer, was seated in his private office; the same bland smile upon his countenance—the same quiet air of virtuous satisfaction in his whole appearance. The very day after the death of Mrs. Mowbray he had sent James to watch what passed at the obscnre lodging where brutal violence had but anticipated the work of famine by a few short honrs. The artful messenger was too wary to commit himself or his employer by any direct qnestions. He had a sort of instinctive presentiment that something serious had occurred; and he entered the little public-house of the Crown and Bear, in the Almonry, with as unconcerned an air as a London pickpocket would endeavour to assume who found himself in contact with a police-officer in a crowd.

The little parlour was full.

"A pipe and ale," demanded James.

He had to repeat the order twice before he was served. The pot-boy was occupied in relating some interesting event to a tall dark-looking woman, respectably, but rather tawdrily, dressed. She was evidently a neighbour; for she was without a bonnet, and held a large door-key on the forefinger of her left hand. The lady in question was no other than Sadler's wife, sent by her husband on the same errand as the clerk; and devilishly well got up she was for the occasion. Several of the idlers of the Almonry and two or three soldiers were present, and a bustling little fellow, who afterwards turned out to be the coroner's clerk. James was too old a hand to ask any questions; but his ears were open to catch all that transpired.

"It was no murder," said the pot-boy, who, having been the first to enter the room, was an important witness; "there is not a mark upon her. My belief is, she was starved."

James was inclined to the same opinion.

"Then what is the use of a crowner's quest?" demanded the woman with the key.

"To put the parish to an expense," replied a little tailor, who was sipping his morning dram, "and a guinea in the pocket of the crowner."

"But what has become of the baby?" demanded a third person.

"That," said the pot-boy, "is the mysteriousest part of all. It couldn't have walked away, seeing it was but a baby; and it could not have been stolen, as the door was locked; besides," he added, "what is the vally of a baby? She can't have eaten it?"

"Perhaps she has," observed the little tailor. "Such things have occurred."

"Bah!" cried several.

"You may 'Bah!'" continued the speaker; "but there are more things eaten in London than people dreams on. Ask Mr. Pattypan—*he knows*."

"Of course there is," said the gentleman alluded to, with a knowing wink; "'tisn't every pieman what's as pertickler as I am what he makes his pies on; but I never runs down my neighbours."

"What's that about a baby?" exclaimed one of the soldiers, drawing his pipe from his mouth, and puffing the smoke into the pot-boy's face.

"Why, the woman's kinchin wot's dead."

"When?"

"Last night."

"My eyes!" said the red coat; "why, Sergeant Gourlay, of our company, found one as he was making his rounds last night in the park. Corporal White's wife has got it."

"Was it dead?" eagerly demanded James, for the first time breaking silence.

The woman with the key fixed her eye upon him, and observed him attentively.

Almost," continued the man, "but we *suscitated* it."

Mrs. Sedler finished her glass of gin and left the tap. She was followed by a man, who had all the appearance of a hackney coachman. He, too, was well dressed for his part; he found her waiting for him outside.

"You heard that fellow?" she whispered.

The man gave a knowing wink, as much as to say, "Didn't I?"

"Follow him, Mike," she said; "there's money to be earned: I must remain here to watch the crowner's quest. Don't lose sight of him, as you vally your life. George would never forgive you."

"Ay, ay, missis, I know my trade. I saw at once that you had stagged him. He must be an artful dodger if he escapes me: few coves ever gave me the go-by. I'll follow him to the devil but I'll earth him all right."

The speaker was one of the most knowing sliuks in London. Gipsy George, like his employer, Lawyer Prim, had his agents, and was quite as faithfully served.

The coroner having arrived, and succeeded in empannelling a jury, they proceeded at once to view the corse; the lawyer's clerk, the woman with the key, and many of the neighbours followed them.

They found the body of the once beautiful Mrs. Mowbray upon the floor of the desolate chamber, just as the murderer had left it—her long black hair clotted with the blood which had followed the gipsy's blow—her features calm and placid. There was almost a smile upon her lips, as if, ere life had quite departed, e'en to her mortal senses, glimpses of paradise, united hearts, and angels' welcoming smiles had been revealed.

"This is no murder!" exclaimed Dr. Bleuspit, the parish surgeon who had been called in; "she has broken a blood-vessel and died from exhaustion—nothing more."

The woman with the key breathed freely, and James quietly chuckled in his sleeve.

"But are you quite sure?" demanded the coroner.

"Quite sure," iterated the son of Æsculapius, "certain. You see, gentlemen," he continued, turning over the body with professional indifference, "there is not a wound or a mark upon her person; the blood has flowed from the lungs—arterial blood. Case is clear—died from rupturing a vessel."

"And starvation," added the pot-boy, "that's my *opinion*."

A verdict of "Died by the visitation of God" was given by the jury, who were anxious to return to their business, and the remains were ordered to be interred at the expense of the parish.

James made the best of his way home, delighted with the success of his mission. Once or twice, as he hurried down the Strand, he noticed a drunken coachman who could scarcely keep his legs; but he lost sight of him long before he reached Temple Bar. There a chair, with the blinds carefully drawn, overtook him. As he entered the Temple, the chairmen stopped, and one of them called to a porter standing near to speak with the person inside.

"Who is that man who has just gone into the court?" demanded the party, without raising the blind.

"Can't say," replied the fellow with the flying horse badge, dissatisfied perhaps that he was merely called to answer a question when he expected a job.

"Perhaps your comrade can," said the inmate; "the answer is worth half-a-crown."

"Do you mean the fellow with the red nose?" exclaimed the porter, his memory suddenly quickened.

"Yes."

"Who just went in?"

"The same."

"I knew him any time these twenty years. It's Lawyer Prim's head clerk; and they do say, as great a rogue as his master."

"Very likely," said the person in the chair, dropping the half-crown carelessly into the porter's hand. "Home!"

The bearers, with a broad grin, resumed their load, which they merely carried into the Strand, when they stopped, and set down their fare: it was the coachman.

Lawyer Prim and Gipsy George were both equally well satisfied with the morning's report. The former, about two hours after his emissary's return, sent for a chair, and ordered the men to convey him to St. James's Square, the residence of his wealthy client Sir Walter Mowbray, whose *eldest surviving son and heir*, as the papers announced it, had that very morning been united to Lady Harriet Neville. As the lawyer approached the house, the noble bride, all lace and orange flowers, was being handed into a gilt travelling chariot, to spend the honeymoon at the ancient seat of the baronet in Kent. A few hours later, and the remains of the widow of the bridegroom's elder brother were placed in a parish coffin, and borne by paupers to their last resting-place. A hungry, over-worked curate muttered the mockery of a prayer, the earth was thrown back, and all was over.

Those who trampled the next day upon the humble grave little recked how warm had been the heart—how true the love—how sad the destiny of her who slept beneath. And what matter, after all? She slept as well as though satin had enshrouded her cold limbs, and her resting-place had been the escutcheoned vault of the proud Mowbrays. One only memorial marked her grave to distinguish it from the rest of the paupers in the parish burying-ground: the pot-boy at the Crown and Bear had a sickly plant of sweet-brier in a pot upon the ledge of the attic window where he slept; in a fit of caprice, or to give it a chance, perhaps, of recovery, he transferred it to the widow's grave. Strange to say, it throve there.

"Now," said the baronet, who contrived to steal a few moments from the brilliant circle of his guests, "tell me your intelligence. The widow——"

"Is dead," said Prim, with a professionally serious look. "I told you, Sir Walter, she could not long hold out."

"Dead!" repeated Sir Walter, and his features slightly changed; "how—not by violence?"

"Starvation," replied the lawyer coolly.

His client shuddered; he had just risen from a table spread with every luxury.

"And the child?" he demanded.

"Provided for at present."

"And no question—no surmise?"

"None," said the man of business; "all passed off as quietly as possible. An inquest was held, and a verdict of natural death returned. But we know better, Sir Walter," he added; "we——"

"I," interrupted the baronet, impetuously, "desire to know no more. Tell me," he added, opening his desk and taking out a cheque-book, "what am I your debtor?"

"A thousand pounds."

Large as the sum was, the cheque was instantly filled up.

"And now," continued Sir Walter, "tell me, for what sum will you take charge of the brat? the—you know well who I mean."

This was a chance the lawyer had not calculated upon, and he bitterly regretted having so hastily abandoned the helpless creature in the park. The evil, however, thanks to James's intelligence, did not appear irremediable. He hastily named a sum.

"Two thousand more."

"Call on me to-morrow, and we will speak further on this matter; and remember," he added, "as you value my future confidence and favour, that what has passed between us must be buried in silence. We understand each other?"

"Perfectly," replied Prim, as he took his leave, and hastily returned to his chambers, in order to send his emissary, James, to make inquiries respecting the child, whom he was now most anxious to recover, as it would give him a hold not only over the present, but future baronet, whose estates were worth the plucking. In this project, however, he was forestalled. James found, on inquiry at the barracks, that the infant had been claimed by an aged couple dressed in mourning, and weighed down, apparently, with grief, who represented themselves as the grandfather and grandmother of the child, which their unhappy daughter, they stated, in a fit of madness, had abandoned in the park. Mrs. Corporal White's charge was accordingly given up to them, much to her dissatisfaction, for she began to feel an interest in the little stranger.

Gipsy George had most probably been at work again.

It was about a month after these events, on the very morning of the duel between Moreton and Fitzgerald, that Prim was seated in his office. The disappearance of the child had completely mystified him. He, of course, did not believe the tale of the grandfather and mother's pretended claim, for he knew the late Mrs. Mowbray to have been an orphan, and the baronet's interference was perfectly out of the question. The astute man of business felt that some one was on his track, and he laboured under a nervous, uneasy sensation; he was not so secure as formerly.

James had just announced a visitor.

"His name?" said Prim.

"Won't tell it, sir."

"Does he look like a client?"

"More like a highwayman, sir," answered the clerk; "he has a sad hang-dog look with him."

"Show him in," said his master nervously, "and close the baize door after him."

James left the office to do as he was desired. In a moment the visitor presented himself. Prim nearly bounced from his chair as he beheld him—it was his old tool in villany, Gipsy George.

"John Brown of Hampstead, how are you?" said the fellow, with a triumphant grin, which seemed to say, "I've found you out at last, old 'un."

"Sir," stammered the lawyer, trying to look as if he had never seen the intruder before.

"Capital!" exclaimed George; "that look would be very valuable at the Old Bailey—you must have practised hard to do it so natural. Vy, don't ye know me?"

"Certainly not," said Prim, recovering in some degree his self-possession; "never saw you before in all my life."

"Whew!" whistled Sedley.

"I'll swear it."

"Of course."

"This must be some extraordinary mistake, my good man," observed Prim, in his blandest voice; "really I know no John Brown of Hampstead or any other place."

"Nor the Rising Sun in St. George's Fields?" he continued.

"No."

"Nor the widow in the Almonry?" repeated the intruder.

"What *are* you talking about, my good man,—what?"

"Nor Sir Walter Mowbray?" added the fellow with a grin.

The lawyer winced.

"Nor the child you left on the bench in the park, —eh?"

Prim glanced at the pistols hanging over the chimney-piece. Sedler's eye followed him.

"Them's pretty barkers," he observed, coolly taking one of them down, and impudently seating himself upon the lawyer's table; "screw barrels: are they charged?"

"Yes."

"Dear me, so they are!" said the man, at the same time untwisting the barrel and letting the contents fall carelessly into his hand.

"*Two bullets and a slug!*" he exclaimed; "well, that is a coincidence, aint it?"

The lawyer felt that all further attempts at denial would be vain. Leaving his chair, he quietly advanced towards the door and slipped the bolt, and then confronted his visitor.

"What do you want?"

"I thought we should understand each other."

"I have paid you for your services, and have done with you," whispered Prim. "If you think to terrify me, you are mistaken; you are in more danger from justice than I am—remember the widow's death."

"Barred by the crowner's quest," replied Sedler.

"The affair, after all," continued the lawyer, "was but of slight importance; a cast-off mistress and a child!"

"Gammon—she was a wife."

"A wife?" repeated Prim.

"I've holy Joe's own hand to prove it."

The lawyer was really puzzled.

"Who the devil," he demanded, "is holy Joe?"

"What!" exclaimed Sedler, with a look of contempt—"you a lawyer and not understand Romani! I thought you chaps could patter all slangs. *'Tis the parson's 'tificate, to be sure.*"

A light broke in upon Prim; he saw in an instant through the whole affair. The gipsy had obtained possession of the widow's papers, and from them a clue to the entire transaction. He saw that the fellow wanted to make a market of him; and as he could not help himself, he resolved to stand the rub.

"Do you know any thing of the child?" he demanded.

Sedler put his finger to his nose, as much as to say, "I did you there!"

"And have you mentioned this to any one?" demanded Prim.

"Gave you the preference," replied the fellow.

"Let me see you again to-morrow night," said the man of law; "I will consider what is to be done, and propose something reasonable—very reasonable."

"*It must be very reasonable.*"

"You will keep dark till then?"

"As a lawyer's conscience," said the fellow, rising from the table and preparing to depart; "remember, he added, "I shall come armed, and not alone; so no foul play. You have had your chance," in allusion to the pistol in the park, "the next will be mine."

"Rely upon me."

"I do. So, till to-morrow night, good-bye, John Brown of Hampstead."

"Damnation!" exclaimed the lawyer, as soon as he was alone; "have all my wire-drawn schemes been brought to this? The ruffian could hang me—hang me!" he repeated, as he ran over in his mind the various terrible practices in which he had employed him; "but not," he added, "without compromising himself. There lies my chance of safety."

"Governor!"

Prim started; his tormentor had returned.

"What more?" he demanded, impatiently.

"Just tell the cackler's slums (the clerks) in the outer ken that they are to admit me. I hate to be kept waiting when I call, and your place is so damned like a beak's office, it makes one uncomfortable. There's a smell of the Old Bailey about it."

"Would you were hanging on the gallows there!" muttered the lawyer, as the gipsy at last withdrew. "Something must be done. I must think—think. Slippery Fortune never played me such a trick before."

With these words he threw himself into his easy chair, and remained for several hours lost in meditation.

CHAPTER V.

Sincerity, thou first of virtues, let no mortal leave
Thy onward path, though from the gulf of hell
destruction cry
To take dissimulation's winding way.—*Hume.*

In a few days Fitzgerald was sufficiently recovered to return to Cambridge, where he received the congratulations of Digby and his friends, all of whom approved of his conduct with Lord Moreton. Far from resenting the affair, the vice chancellor never once noticed it. The son of the minister must have been included in the punishment.

Time passed pleasantly with our hero, who made many agreeable friends, as well as some few butterfly acquaintances, which flutter round us in the sunshine of youth—things born but for pleasure and the follies of the day. With Digby he retained, if he did not increase, the intimacy which existed between them; for the originality of the cynic amused him, and he was too much a man of the world and practical philosopher to be annoyed at the bitterness of his sarcasm, even when directed towards himself. Perhaps, too, the sting was lessened, since he had discovered that, with all his friend's quickness in detecting the characters of those around him, he was sometimes deceived. For instance, they never could agree in their opinion of a Mr. Darwin. To Digby he appeared a reprover of the lax morals of his young companions, studious, severe to himself, a contemner of the frivolities of the day: to Fitzgerald's keen judgment, a hypocritical compound of affectation and pedantry, continually acting a part at variance with his natural character.

"We shall never agree in our opinion of that fellow," observed Digby, one day, after they had passed Darwin, book in hand. "Were not the thing absurd, I should imagine that you feared him; he is the same year man. What can have blinded your judgment?"

"Rather let me demand," replied his friend, "what can have blinded yours, since you have mistaken slyness for virtue, and idle declamation for purity of principle? Tell me," he continued, "with all Darwin's lectures against the sin of drunkenness, does he ever refuse an invite to wine? With all his objection to an obscene song, does he ever declaim against it till it is finished? The other evening—that disgusting affair which Lord Harry sang, did you observe how his eyes sparkled?"

"As mine did, with indignation."

"Well, time will show. A man may enact the hypocrite successfully for weeks, or even for years, but in some unguarded moment his real character will break forth. The germs of character, like the fabled seeds of the amaranth flower, are immortal; bury them beneath the artificial ramparts of hypocrisy, and

they will vegetate through the interstices of the stones. You will one day know him."

"As you say, time, that great unraveller of various mysteries, will show. By the bye," continued Digby, "speaking of time, I should like your opinion upon the question." Does Time create more mysteries than it reveals—what think you?"

"That it will unravel as many at least, since history and tradition snatch so many from its destroying hand."

"True," replied his friend, "and to time let us leave Darwin; it is presumptuous to judge him."

"To call a man presumptuous because he doubts the opinion or judgment of another, is neither just nor philosophical," observed Fitzgerald; "it is wrong both in ethics and science. Had such a dogma been permitted to hold its place, Luther might have remained a drone in his monastery, Columbus have stayed at home, and Newton have turned gardener."

"Then as you are so decided in your opinion of Darwin, most probably you will refuse the invitation of which I am the bearer. He will be of age on Thursday, and gives a dinner at Chesterton to his friends."

"Will Lord Harry be there?" demanded Fitzgerald.

"I should think not; I cannot answer though, for a man is sometimes forced to invite another against his inclination, such is the artificial state in which we live."

"And a very trifling penance too, for the many *agremens* which it brings us. To show you," said Fitzgerald, "how light I deem it, I accept Darwin's invitation; shall we meet there, or walk together to Chesterton?"

"There. I have agreed to ride over in the morning."

"Agreed."

And the two friends separated to meet again on the following Thursday.

The day arrived at last. As Darwin was known to be rich, and had hitherto been very sparing of his hospitality, under pretence of not exceeding his allowance whilst a minor, his friends were curious to see the style in which he would receive them, now that the possession of an ample fortune left him no excuse on the score of prudence. Those who expected he would be mean were equally disappointed, for the dinner was not only abundant, but comprised all the delicacies of the season, and wines of the choicest description.

There were sundry sly winks and nods amongst the party on Lord Harry's side of the table when their host favoured them with a long Latin grace. Dinner passed over without any thing worthy of note. Conversation was so temperately carried on that even their moral host found no opportunity of censuring it.

"Is not this a proof," whispered Digby to his friend Gerald, "of the strong influence of example? Darwin's character, you perceive, can restrain even these wild dissolute madmen."

"Wait awhile," said our hero, who observed with what rapidity they passed the bottle, and saw the intention of the party was, if possible, to intoxicate their host. "Time will show; either you or I may change our opinions before we sleep. You have not yet wined with him."

"Can you keep a secret?" whispered Lord Linton.

Fitzgerald nodded.

"They have sworn to make our host drunk; the plot is well laid. Does not Lord Harry play propriety like an auld actor? It mun be a sair struggle, I am thinking, with his natural disposition. I must wine with the fellow. Do you follow."

The attentions of his guests rapidly succeeded to each other, and, long ere the cautious Darwin was aware of it, the mingled claret and champagne had taken effect upon his reason. The conspirators observed it, and were silently enjoying the success of their schemes. They had feared the interference of Digby, whose keen perception would speedily have discovered their plans, had not Fitzgerald, willing to aid in the exposure of a hypocrite, purposely detained him in a speculative argument upon the force of education, his favourite theme. The candles, too, were so placed as to prevent the cynic from seeing the flushed brow of his host.

A song was called for, and Lord Harry was named to sing it.

"I shall have much pleasure in hearing a song," exclaimed Darwin, suppressing a violent hiccup; "but it must not be too bad, you understand me; let us be moral above all things."

The powers of reason were not yet sufficiently obscured to make him lose sight of his assumed character.

"You see," whispered Digby, "the force of moral perseverance—these fellows are absolutely reforming. If Lord Harry keeps Darwin's company much longer I shall have hopes of his becoming a rational creature."

"There are worse men in the world than Lord Harry," replied his friend, with a significant look towards the upper end of the table; "he, at least, is no dissembler."

Digby would have answered with even more than his usual bitterness, had he not at that moment been requested to give a toast.

Thus called upon, he rose and proposed the health of their host on his arrival at the important age of twenty-one. With elegant rapidity he ran over the virtues and acquirements which, in his opinion, gave him so high a claim to their consideration, and doubted not but such sterling qualities would lead to the most brilliant results.

The toast was received as all toasts are which are intended to compliment the donor of a feast, where the wine is good and the venison in prime order. Their host rose to return thanks.

"It was a canny speech, that of Digby's," whispered Lord Linton; "but I'm thinking," he added, as he watched the unsteady manner of Darwin, "that it will surprise him a little when he returns thanks."

"Gentlemen—gentlemen," hiccupped the speaker, "my friend Digby is—(hiccup)—a damned good fellow, only a little precise in his notions—(hiccup again)—and a wise man will humour his weak points——"

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed the guests, who highly enjoyed Digby's surprise and confusion, as well as their host's exposure. "Proceed—go on—hear!"

"Good heavens!" whispered the proposer of the toast to Fitzgerald; "why poor Darwin is positively drunk—how shocking! I must go to him."

His companion seized him by the arm.

"Have you courage to hear the truth? The man whom you have esteemed and held up as a pattern of morality is an obscene libertine, a liar, and a hypocrite. Let him alone, and he will expose himself. I pledge my honour no unfair advantage shall be taken."

The earnestness of the speaker's tone made a painful impression on Digby, and he remained silent.

Darwin continued:

"It's a pleasant thing to arrive at years of discretion"—hiccup—"and, gentlemen, I have no doubt but you all envy me. But"—hiccup—"mind and be moral. I owe my being of age solely to my morality. My uncle, a puritanical old humbug"—hiccup—"could have kept me out of my fortune for three years longer, had he not been convinced of my morality."

"Hear! hear!" exclaimed several of the guests, delighted with the expose. "Excellent!—clever! sensible fellow!—knowing move!"

Digby was painfully excited. Fitzgerald smiled significantly.

"Come," whispered the former, "let us be gone, for I am sick at heart."

"One more proof, and I accompany you," replied his friend.

'Bravo!" shouted Lord Linton, at the same time disgusted with the scene, yet willing to see thoroughly into his host's character; "can't ye gi' us a merry song?"

"A merry"—hiccup—"song—to be sure I can—d—n this hiccup—not such psalm-singing ones as those we have had to-night, but a right good jovial song."

Entirely thrown off his guard, he immediately commenced one of the most obscene in the whole collection of the freshman's song-book, but broke down in the midst of the first verse, when he dropped into his seat with a tremendous oath.

He sat in a sort of stupor for a few minutes, then getting up, filled his glass, and demanded, as a gleam of recollection crossed his mind:

"Where's Digby?"

"Gone home, lad, with that milk-sop Fitzgerald," replied Linton; "your wine was too much for them."

"Good," said Darwin, again sinking into his chair, forgetful of the purpose for which he had risen. "I'll read them a d——d good lecture on temperance to-morrow. Glad they are off! Now for some fun—push the bottle. Halloo there!—claret—more claret!"

The two friends quietly left the room, followed by Lord Harry.

"Well, Digby," demanded the latter with a triumphant smile, "what think you of your moralist?"

The cynic was too much agitated to reply, which his lordship perceiving, good-naturedly left him and returned to the party.

At no period was conversation less rigid than about the middle of the last century, when phrases which would now banish the speaker to the kitchen or the stable were familiar in the saloons of the noble and even of the virtuous. It was not therefore to be expected that the Cantabs, many of them young men with large fortunes, should assert a higher standard of morality than their elders; but even they were at last disgusted by the gratuitous infamy of their despicable host, whose obscenity increased with the immoderate quantity of wine which, in spite of remonstrance, he persevered in drinking.

"I can afford it," he would exclaim, in reply to some well-meant hint; "d——n, I have played the sober long enough. If I were to swim in claret I should only make up for lost time."

Then he broke off into a snatch of some obscene song, and urged his companions to join in chorus. This continued, till at last he became so intoxicated that he was unable to stand.

"Whatever our opinions of our host may be," exclaimed Lord Harry, "we cannot leave him in this state; we must see him safely to his college; the air may refresh him"

"D—n him, leave him," said another; "for my part I am disgusted with the hypocrite."

The more generous opinion, however, of Lord Harry prevailed; and after some little persuasion, Darwin was induced to accompany them.

The quiet village of Chesterton was alarmed at the loud singing and bacchanalian shouts of the party, several of whom were intoxicated, although not to the extent of their host. They at last reached the ferry and boat-house, and knocked up the man; thanks to whose care, and the assistance of the few who were sober, the whole party reached the common in safety. It was now daylight.

"All's right now, gentlemen," said Lord Harry; "I am not in college. I wish you good-night, or rather good-morning, and a safe delivery of your precious cargo. Take care of yourselves."

His lordship and the more sober ones of the party, who did not wish to risk an encounter with the proctors or their bull-dogs, made their way towards Jesus Lane.

"The hound!" said the young noble, alluding to his host, "I am disgusted with him. I detest a canting rascal who does nothing but preach against pleasure and life's innocent enjoyments. But even the fanatic is more to be tolerated than the hypocrite."

"I for one shall cut him," observed another of the party.

"Digby and Fitzgerald have already done so," added a third. "Did you observe their look at Darwin as they quitted the room? I pity the former from my soul; he was always citing the fellow as a pattern of virtue; he will look accursedly ridiculous now."

"Not half so ridiculous as the other will appear contemptible," replied Lord Harry, upon whom the events of the night had made a salutary impression. "Adieu."

The paths of the speakers being different here, they separated.

Darwin, and the few who remained with him, pursued their way towards Garlick Fair Lane, but the air had produced a contrary effect to that anticipated. He became miserably ill from the excess in which he had indulged, and at last utterly incapable even of walking.

"Linton," exclaimed one of the young men, laughing immoderately, as their host fell upon the grass, "you are the strongest, and must carry him."

"Indeed, lad—must I!" replied the Scot coolly, regarding at the same time the drunken man with the greatest possible disgust. "You must first pump upon him. Besides he is a commoner, and not entitled to noble supporters."

"Bravo!" cried several who were not too drunk to understand the jest, for the speaker had a spark of that sly humour common to most of his countrymen.

"Halloo!" roared Linton to a boy at a distance, who was driving a cow over the common towards the town. "Here is a conveyance for him. Europa rode upon a bull. Silenus surely may be contented with a cow."

The boy and the cow came at the summons, and a bargain was struck for five shillings. The urchin grinned; for it was not often that he had made such a morning's work.

The now insensible Darwin was placed upon the animal's back, and held on his seat by the stout arm of his conductor. Whether the motion increased the uneasiness of his stomach we do not pretend to say; but certain it is, that he became much worse, as, with his head hanging over the rump of the beast, he approached the entrance to Trinity College. His friends, satisfied with having seen him within sight of the gate, departed, leaving him to the especial care of the cow-boy.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Professor Speculative, who had been one of Darwin's great admirers, and always cited him as a pattern to the men, "whom have we here? a gownsman of Trinity on a cow! Where did you find the gentleman, boy?"

The speaker, who was an early riser, was just about to sally forth for his morning's walk.

"With never so many more, sur," grinned the rustic; "they wor all drunk."

By this time the porter had come up, and began to reconnoitre the cow and its rider.

"Bless me!" said the man; "it can't be! Yes, it is, though."

"Who is it, porter, that thus disgraces his college?" demanded the professor.

"Mr. Darwin, sir."

"Mr. Darwin!" repeated the now equally astonished Speculative; "impossible; you must be mistaken. Quiet, man."

"*It is*," repeated the porter, secretly well pleased at the exposure, for Darwin had never been liberal to him in the way of fees; "I could hardly believe my eyes at first myself, sir. But what am I to do with him?"

"Call his gyp, and see him to bed."

"Is the cow to go into college, sur?" demanded the boy, scratching his head.

The learned professor, who was also tutor to his college, either heard not or pretended not to hear the question, and left the two beasts to be dealt with by the porter.

CHAPTER VI.

"When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war."

It was some time after the departure of Gipsy George before Lawyer Prim recovered from the consternation into which the visit had thrown him. He felt that he was doubly compromised: first, his re-

spectability, which, as it was a marketable commodity, he naturally felt anxious to maintain; then his safety, which was dearer to him than every thing—even the gold for which he had risked his life and damned himself with crime. Desperate as his case appeared at the first sight, still he was not altogether without hope; he had weathered as rough a storm as this, and at the end of his long cogitation he prepared once more for action.

James, as was usual when any dirty work was to be done, was summoned to his presence.

"James," said his master, "has Mr. Shark been with the papers?"

"In the outward office, sir."

"How is he?"

"Drunk, as usual."

"Is he?" replied the lawyer, with a scarcely perceptible smile of satisfaction. "Show him in."

Lawyer Prim was solicitor to the association of merchants and traders for the prosecution of forgers and thieves; as such, it was his duty to prepare the indictments against the unfortunate wretches whom hunger or vice had led to violate the first law of civilisation—the law of property. In the good old banging days of George III., this office was no sinecure; and Mr. Shark, the person whom he inquired after, was the party who brought him the proofs, examinations, &c., from the magistrate's office, after the committal of the prisoners, in order to prepare the evidence against them, and get up briefs for counsel. At this very time Hiram Moses, the son of old Moses, the wealthiest rascal that ever lived by training youth to the gallows, was lying in Newgate for a forgery upon a private bank. The fatal cheque was amongst the papers which Shark was supposed to have brought. The proofs were so clear that there appeared little hope of saving him. The aged father, in whose heart one touch of nature, love for his only child still lingered, had vainly offered an immense sum to compound the matter.

"So you have brought the papers," said Prim, as the Bardolph-like messenger entered.

"All right," hiccuped Shark, tossing the packet upon the table.

"Sit down while I examine them. James," added the lawyer, "write the list as I call them over."

The speaker took his seat, the hungry clerk next him, and Shark directly opposite; the chair of the latter personage was placed directly fronting the window, through the dusty panes of which the rays of the sun were pouring, and prevented his seeing very distinctly.

"Copy of committal," repeated Prim, taking the papers from the envelope, one by one.

"All right, sir," replied James, making a memorandum.

"Evidence of Discount, the banker."

"It's down, sir."

"Ditto of Mr. Pawsey, the cashier."

"Got it."

"Nabbs, the officer's."

"Marked."

"But where is the cheque?" exclaimed Prim, in a tone of surprise and disappointment. "I don't see the cheque."

"You will find it in the parcel, sir," said Shark; "it must be there, for I put it in myself"

"*It ought to be there,*" replied the lawyer, gravely; "for without it all the rest is useless."

"It is there!" exclaimed the messenger, beginning to feel alarmed, and hastily rising to examine the papers.

"Perhaps you will be so good as to point it out then?" said the man of law, "for really I cannot find it. Did you see any other paper, James?"

"Certainly not, sir," answered the convenient clerk, who knew all the while that his master had contrived to secrete it up his sleeve.

"God!" exclaimed the fellow, completely sobered by the loss, "I thought I could have sworn I placed it with the others. Ah! you are jesting with me, Mr. Prim; I am sure you are jesting."

"I never jest," observed the lawyer drily; "do I, James?"

"Never, sir," echoed his subordinate with a grin.

Again did the terrified messenger pass and repass the papers carefully, unfolding each in the hope that it had been slipped by accident within another. Satisfied of the inutility of his search, he let them fall despairingly, muttering as he did so, "It is not there."

"Of course it is not—perhaps you dropped it in the office?"

The fellow shook his head despondingly.

"Did you stop any where?" demanded Prim in a soothing voice.

"At the Bell—but only for about half an hour."

"Perhaps you fell asleep there?" observed his questioner, who was perfectly aware of Mr. Shark's habits as well as his peculiar weakness.

The fellow hung down his head, and confessed that he had indulged in a nap, but only for a few minutes. It was, he said, after a pint of purl which he had been invited to partake of by his old friend, Mr. Aarons, the sheriff's officer.

"Aarons is a Jew, I think?" observed Prim, who was perfectly well acquainted with that respectable individual, and chuckled secretly at the fortunate coincidence.

"You know he is," ejaculated Shark despairingly.

"An ugly piece of business—really a very ugly piece of business," said the satisfied lawyer; "all I can do in it, of course, will be to write to the magistrates; otherwise, I should be responsible."

"It will ruin me. I shall lose my place."

"I sincerely trust you may lose nothing more, my dear Shark; but persons who do not know your sterling honesty as well as I do may be inclined to suspect. Mind I insinuate nothing, that you have been tampered with; it really does look a little suspicious."

Mr. Prim, who really was an obliging person in his peculiar way, suffered himself to be persuaded by the earnest entreaties of the terrified messenger to wait for three hours before he fulfilled his threat of writing to the magistrate, and the now sobered victim of his clever sleight of hand ran back to the Bell in the hope of meeting his old friend, Mr. Aarons.

"Serious affair, sir," said James, who felt that he was entitled to a fee for his professional assistance in the transaction; "if Shark should not happen to find the cheque, what will become of him?"

"Transported, most probably," replied his master, coolly.

"What if he should assert that the bill was in the packet?" observed the clerk.

"You can swear it was not."

James for once was silent. His master missed his ready "Yes, sir," and raised his eyes to look at him: the expression of his countenance did not altogether please him.

"Perhaps he may swear you took it, sir," observed the man, willing to say something.

"Pah!" replied the lawyer; "my respectability is undoubted. I could langh at him."

"Of conrse you could, sir—*in your sleeve.*"

This was a home tbrust; there was no parrying it. Prim saw at once that his appropriation of the document had been detected by the sharp-eyed clerk, who had long been dissatisfied at the smallness of the sop which his master threw from time to time, as if to a hnngry dog, to quiet him. He felt that the hour was come when he must act with more liberality and caution. Opening his pocket-book, he took out a note for fifty pounds, and desired James to procure change for it, and pay the laundress her week's wages out of it. The sum amounted to eight shillings.

"Certainly, sir; *and bring you the change?*"

"No, James. As I have given you a little extra tronble lately, you may keep tbat yourself."

James's face brightened. Forty-nine pounds twelve shillings was a larger sum tban he had ever yet possessed at one time; it was a step to independence. His doubts vanished in an instant; and he would have sworn, in tbe first blush of his gratitude, to his master's honesty, his own conscientiousness, or any other monstrous lie that reqnired a steady nerve or cool impndence.

"James," said the lawyer, as he was going out of the office, "I don't think you heard my question."

"What was it, sir?"

"Whether you could not swear that there was no cheqne in tbe packet Shark brought?"

"*Of course I can, sir.* How stupid I must bave been not to have heard you! but I am a little deaf at times."

"A little! but away with you."

A few minutes later and Mr. Prim sallied forth from his legal den and directed his steps towards Fetter Lane, in which locality were several receiving-houses—places kept open all night—with crucibles ready, and a glowing fire, to melt plate, watch-cases, or any other species of valuable plnnder which the proprietors—generally Jews—might purchase of the sons of blood and rapine. The most noted of these was the one which called Mr. Moses master. It was sitnated at the bottom of a long, dark, narrow passage, like the den of a field-spider, and commnnicated at the back and sides with several adjacent streets, so that if a visitor were watched to the principal entrance, it would be very difficnlt to speculate in what street he might make his reappearance. Long as the house had been watched, and often as it had been inspected by the police, they had never yet snccceded in obtaining possession of any of the stolen property which was nightly brought there in a recognisable form. It was conveyed through an aperture in the wall to a strongly barred chamber, and qnickly lost all identity in the melting pot.

Moses, like other respectable tradesmen, had his regular customers and took a peculiar method of keeping them. The moment a fellow entered into commercial transactions with him he retained one proof at least that wonld hang him. It seldom occurred, tberefore, that an account opened under snch circumstances was closed unless by the hangman. Prim was perfectly aware of this prndent arrangement on the part of the dealer, whose son, as we before observed, was waiting his trial for forgery n Newgate.

"Bless ma soul, Mr. Prim!" exclaimed the astonshed Jew, as the lawyer entered his dismal den, which was generally deserted during the day; "what prings you here—any ting in my vay?"

"Hem! why not exactly in your way, although it concerns you deeply."

"Very vell—vat is it?"

"You have a son?"

"Of conrse I've a son," replied the old man, turning deadly pale; for, as we said before, he loved him—"a fool, who, instead of sticking, as I do, to a respectable business, vanted to be a gentleman—pretty gentleman in Newgate—cost me a deal of monies, Mr. Prim, a deal—set bim up twice, vonce in the clothes line, and then in my own—vonld not do—no head for business; but vat," he added, peering curiously into the lawyer's face, "have you to say about Ruben?"

"Nothing, but that the case is strong against him."

"Know it!" exclaimed the Jew in despair. "Fool—took the cheque himself! Pretty way of doing things! he ought to have known better, seeing how I prought him up."

"Doubtless," observed Prim.

"But vat do yon vant vith me?" demanded Moses.

"You are aware that I am solicitor for the prosecution?"

"Vell?"

"That all the papers are in my possession?"

"Vell?"

"And seeing tbat there is no chance of his escape," continued the visitor—"that he must be convicted—and knowing you to be a respectable man, from having successfully defended you tbree times at the Old Bailey, I thought, as I was passing, I wonld just come in and condole with you—that's all."

"Tank you,' sighed Moses, "tank you. Vil you vork in? I have some fiud schedam from Holland, and gold vasser; the king don't drink better. Vork in—we can talk better there."

They understood each other, but were afraid to show they did so.

Tbey had been seated some little time in Mr Moses's comfortably furnished back parlour, with the liquor before them, before either of them spoke; tbey were internally calculating their game. Prim was the first to break silence.

"Yours must be a peculiar business, Mr. Moses," he observed.

"It is very peculiar," replied his host.

"I am told," continued his visitor, "that you keep some rather curious memorials of all the men with whom you transact business."

"Wery," said the dealer significantly, "wery curious memorials; it's a part of my system."

"Are you acquainted with one George Sedler?"

"Vat!" exclaimed tbe Jew, warming into enthusiasm, "the prince of cracksmen, the knowing cove, the feller vot has more dodges than aliases to his name?—I should tink so."

"Have you any memorial of him?"

Moses' enthusiasm snddenly changed, and his countenance became serious. After a few moments' consideration, during which it was curious to watch tbe working of his wrinkled brow, he answered:

"No"

"Good morning, Mr. Moses," said Prim, rising, and moving towards the door; "I am sorry for Ruben."

"Stay, stay," faltered the old man; "give me a moment more to tink."

The visitor quietly reseated himself.

"Vat do you vant vid it?" demanded the J w, suddenly; "vat sort of a memorial do you expect?"

"One of your usual ones," insinuated the lawyer, blandly.

"Do yon vish to hang him?"

"No; only to muzzle him."

"And vat," sighed the dealer, the cold perspiration pouring from his forehead, for he felt the danger of provoking the desperate ruffian—"vat will you give me for it?"

"A *cheque* to any amount," said Prim.

"*Vould eight hundred* he too much?" demanded Moses. This was the sum his son had forged for.

Not at all; I think it only reasonable."

And drawn on Discount's?" This was the name of the banker forged upon.

"Assuredly."

"Then," said the Jew. "yon shall have it. I'll pring it to yon myself. George little tinks I've got it. Yon can hang him," he whispered; "yon'd better hang him, he'il he ont of the way den, and I shall sleep quietly; he'd cut my troat ven he finds it ont. Do hang him!"

"*Most likely I shall*," observed the lawyer; "but not yet."

"Go along home," said the Jew; "I'll be vith you in an hour. Holy Father Abraham!" he added, in an accent of terror; "if George should find me out—if he only should!"

"We shall be enahled to muzzle him," replied Prim, "rely npon it. Good morning."

The two worthies separated—the legal rascal to his chambers in the Temple, and honest Mr. Moses to his mnseum, so rich in relics of the cut-throats and highwaymen of the day.

At six in the evening they met again. The Jew had brought the *memorial* with him. First he prodnced an old paper, which gave an acconnt of a mnrder committed in Essex on the 1st of May, some fifteen years since, and offering a reward of fifty ponnds for the apprehension of the murderer, who had, amongst other articles, taken from the hody of his victim a peculiarly-shaped watch, a repeater, set in a tortoiseshell and silver case—maker's name, Le Pine, Colchester; No. 3827. Prim carefully read over all the particulars, and looked at the date of the paper. Folding it carefully up, he nodded to his visitor, as much as to say, "That will do."

Mr. Moses next, with a tremhling hand, produced a watch exactly similar to the one described, from his pocket, and held it up to the light.

"Is it a repeater?" demanded the lawyer.

Moses pushed the spring and it struck the half hour.

"Can I see the nnmber?"

His visitor carefully took it ont of his case, which he put in his pocket, opened the works, and showed the fatal figures, 3827. A smile quivered on the thin lips of the lawyer—he was satisfied.

"And you bought this of Sedler?"

"I did."

"When?"

"On the *second of May*, fifteen years since."

"Sign me a memorandum to that effect," said Prim, "and there is the cheque."

He held up the morsel of paper on which the life of the old man's son depended, sufficiently near for him to read, hut ont of his reach.

It was no scruple of generosity or honour which made the Israelite hesitate, hnt sheer terror. Gipsy George was known to be both resolnte and revengeful; his friend Moses would have cut his throat withont the least remorse, but he trembled at the idea of exciting his resentment. In his extremity he proffered gold, that dross which through life had been the idol of his avaricious heart, for which he had damned himself—hut all in vain; Prim did not want his money. Paternal love at last prevailed — the memorandum was signed, and the watch delivered.

The cheque, according to promise, was instantly given up, and instantly destroyed.

"I feel," sighed the old man, "that I have signed my death-warrant. George vill never forgive me. Vish to God, Mr. Prim, yon'd hang him. I'll be half the expense—all," he added; "only hang him—hang him!"

The speaker's terrors were not ill founded: he had escaped the conseqnences of a thousand crimes to perish by the only virtuous feeling he ever knew—paternal love.

Selder was true to his appointment in the Temple; he entered the outer office with his usual air of saucy indifference, beneath which, however, he contrived to keep an observant eye on all he saw. Two men muffled in great coats, who were drinking porter and smoking near the fire with James, only drew from him a sneer.

"Does the old fool imagine I am going to kill the goose," he mnrmured, "which is to lay me golden eggs?—not quite so green as that."

Yet he was, with all his knowledge of the world, greener than he was aware of; for these two men were no other than Bow Street officers, whose services had been *conditionally* required.

"Well, old 'un!" he exclaimed, seating himself, as on his first visit, on the table, "have you made np yonr mind?"

"Perfectly," said the lawyer.

"Let's hear it."

"To give you another hundred guineas for those papers, if yon choose to deliver them up."

"Hundred!" repeated Gipsy George, in a tone of contempt; "why they are worth a thonsand!"

"Not a penny more."

"I'm off then. Perhaps Sir Walter Mowbray will be more reasonable. I'm off to him."

"You mnst be quick then," observed Prim, taking the repeater from his fob, and striking it, the hour was half-past six, "or he will be gone to the house."

There was nothing very extraordinary in the action of the lawyer; perhaps it was the tone in which he spoke; hut it attracted the attention of his visitor, who had nearly reached the door. He turned suddenly round, and his eye fell upon the watch. In an instant his impudence left him, aud he turned deadly pale. The murderer recognised it.

"Why don't you go?" asked Prim, with a fiend-like smile; "are you afraid that the two men in the outer office should ask any unpleasant questions?"

Sedler seated himself. This time he took a chair.

"Don't let me detain you," continued the man of law, still holding the watch in his hand.

"Damnation!" muttered the gipsy; "for the second time completely foiled."

"Do you admire my watch, that you eye it so closely?" demanded Prim; "it is rather a remarkable one."

"Yes. Will you sell it?" eagerly exclaimed his visitor.

"No, George, no; it's a *very valuable* one to me. I have had it a long time. I might have had fifty pounds for it any time these fifteen years."

"Perhaps," said the ruffian the cold perspiration pouring off him as he spoke, "you would exchange it for the papers you name?"

"Not at all likely," said Prim; "but if you behave well, I'll keep it carefully for you, and leave it you as a legacy when I die. You had better take the hundred guineas."

Sedler thought so too.

"You can keep the child," said the old rascal, with a smile, after the transaction was concluded, and the papers safe in his iron chest; "and perhaps I may allow you a trifle towards his support. But understand me, George, you must never call here unless I send for you—never."

"As you please, sir." It was astonishing how tractable the fellow had become.

"Good-night," continued his host; "stay, I'll go with you through the outer office—it will be best for you."

This was the signal agreed upon with the officers. If Sedler passed through alone, they were to arrest him; if accompanied by Prim, they were to take no notice.

"I have had no occasion for your services, gentlemen," said the lawyer, as he returned from seeing his visitor to the bottom of the stairs; "but there is a guinea each for the trouble I have given you. The mistake has been satisfactorily explained."

Thus ended the first of a series of games between Mr. Prim and the gipsy, which were something like games of chess—much calculation and little chance; but one of them was doomed to be checkmated at last, which time will show.

CHAPTER VII.

Oh, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you.
Shakespeare.

The clock in the great court of Trinity had struck twelve the morning after the debauch at Chesterton, ere Darwin, after turning lazily in his bed, and giving one or two yawns, fairly awoke.

"Where am I? Oh, in college—all right. Digby, I dare say, saw me home. I fear," he added. "I was infernally drunk last night. I shall lose ground if it reaches Mr. Speculative's ears."

These and a thousand confused recollections of his song and extraordinary ride, flitted like Banquo's ghosts across his brain, and he began to entertain considerable doubts as to the stability of the good name which he had been guilty of so much hypocrisy to secure, and in which, although one great purpose was obtained, from ulterior views he was anxious to persevere in

"Pshaw! it can be nothing but a foolish dream!" he exclaimed, ringing at the same time the bell for his gyp, who in a few moments stood by his master's bed-side.

"How did I get home last night?" he demanded, "I fear that I was rather overcome with wine. Did Mr. Digby accompany me?"

"No, sir," replied the gyp, with great difficulty restraining an inclination to laugh; "I saw no one but the boy, and—and——"

"Whom?" roared Darwin.

"The *cow*, sir!" spluttered the man, vainly endeavouring to maintain his gravity.

The recollection was too much for him, and he laughed till the tears roled down his grimy face.

"Hell and ten thousand devils!" exclaimed the hypocrite, convinced that the extraordinary ride which had haunted his imagination was no dream.

"That is not all," continued the man, as soon as he was able to speak; "just as you reached the gates on horse—I beg pardon, on cow-back—Mr. Speculative was leaving college for his usual morning walk, and insisted on your name being sent to the master."

"Damnation!" muttered the now sober student; "a pretty trick! No matter; it will cost me but a few lies to turn all the disgrace upon the contrivers of it. Could Digby have been present?—no, no, he must have left before I made such an ass of myself. Breakfast and soda-water!" he added aloud.

The speaker had been seated at table more than half an hour, expecting, as is usual after a party, a call from his friends, not one of whom, however, as yet, had made his appearance. The non-arrival of Digby filled him with a disagreeable foreboding. At length, to his infinite relief, Lord Linton was announced, and Darwin felt glad to see him; although, under other circumstances, he would as soon have seen the proctors in his rooms as the cold sarcastic Scotchman. Policy alone induced him to invite him to his party on the preceding day.

"My dear Linton," he exclaimed, "this is kind. I began to think my friends had forgotten me, although some of them have little claim to the name after the ungentlemanly trick they played me. Have you heard of the affair?"

"Heard of it!" repeated the Scot, with a look of surprise; "why Cambridge rings with it. I have already seen the commencement of two poems on the subject; and God knows how many mair are likely to be in hand. Why, lad, ye'll be immortalised in verse like Johnny Gilpin, baith blank and rhyme."

Darwin began pacing the room in an ungovernable passion, to which, for a few moments, he gave way. Stopping suddenly opposite to his visitor, who was quietly enjoying his confusion, he said:

"But one way, Lord Linton, I feel, remains to put a stop to this unmanly jest—demanding satisfaction of the ungentlemanly perpetrators, and of all who venture to repeat it. You, doubtless, were present; oblige me by giving up their names. If you are my friend, you cannot hesitate."

"Your friend!—of course I am your friend," answered the peer, secretly rejoicing at the precaution he had that morning taken of binding over to secresy all who had been concerned in the affair. "But d'ye think that I am a likely mon," he added, "to have stood tamely by, and seen my friend—my host, wha had been regaling me with claret and champagne, and heaven kens how mony gude things beside—made sic an ass of? No! lad, no! it may be English, but it's no Scotch fashion. I ken nae mair than the mon in the moon, and maybe no half as much, for the fickle goddess shone late last night, or rather early this morning. "Ye'll excuse my laughing," he added; "but were ye no a maist particular friend, I should think it the best joke I have heard this term."

"Hell and—Heaven pardon me," said Darwin, checking the word, and trying to look shocked; "but it's enough to make a moral man for once forget himself. I had almost fallen into the sin of an oath."

"Weel, and where's the harm?" demanded his visitor. "Surely, after last night's confession, ye'll never pit on that cloak of hypocrisy agin? Digby and a few such milk-and-water fellows may cut you," he added; "but for my ain part, I think it was a canny

trick to make your auld uncle gi' up your fortune four years before the law would have compelled him. How astonished the auld Puritan will be! but not mair so, I'm thinking, than your friend Digby was when ye let the cat out of the bag."

"So my hope of his borough is gone," thought Darwin, mentally recurring to the motive which had induced him to cultivate the cynic's good opinion. "Ass that I am! Well, my lord," he said aloud, "you are the bearer of agreeable intelligence."

"It is my wish," observed the Scot, drily; "but my intelligence is not a whit mair agreeable than the surprise ye gave us all last night. We puir fules were inclined to be very moral in our songs and speeches; but no—the butterfly was no longer a grub—excuse the simile—nothing less than the freshman's flash chants would suit ye. Why, Darwin," he added, "ye ken them all as weel, and may be better, than I do my prayers."

"And was Digby present at that, too?" demanded the young man.

"All the time. But after that last song of Rosy Bet he left with his friend Fitzgerald. In my opinion they are baith a leetle precise. But what matter? Ye'll find plenty of roaring lads to keep ye in countenance—fellows of the same metal."

"Yourself for one?" demanded his host, in an inquiring tone, wishing to ascertain how far the disaffection had or was likely to spread.

"Ye ken," said the Scot, "I am a steady man; so if ye'll just drop in in a quiet way, I'll be glad at any time to see ye; but neither my fortune, or my health will allow of such frolics as last night. Therefore if we should be seen rather less together, it does no follow that we are the less friends."

The lip of his hearer curled in scorn at the shuffling spirit of his quondam friend, but he judged it prudent for the present to let it pass unnoticed.

"As your pleasures and devices lead you," he carelessly replied. "I suppose I must now consider myself fairly embarked as a man of *ton*. A short walk will, I should think, scarcely compromise your lordship's purity. Come," he added, taking up his cap and gloves, "we shall doubtless meet some of our friends in the grounds."

His visitor shuffled, looked uneasy, pleaded a near engagement, and begged to be excused.

"Look you, my lord," cried Darwin, amongst whose vices cowardice was not to be numbered; "unless I am to consider this visit as a premeditated insult and direct break, you must postpone your *pressing engagement*."

There was a decision in the speaker's tone which Linton felt it would be imprudent to brave—not that he would have fought him under any circumstances; but the *éclât* of a quarrel he wished to avoid, especially as the creeping out of it was attended with loss of honour.

"Ye are a strange fellow," said Linton; "had I not been your friend, should I have called with the fumes of the claret and champagne rolling in my brain, to break the little disagreeable intelligence which another might have done with less consideration? and, after such a proof of friendship, d'ye think I'll refuse to be seen with ye? not if ye were ten times mair laughed at than I trust ye will be."

By this last sneer, the young lord, who felt that his own rank would secure him from any share of the contempt into which his companion had fallen, avenged himself for his forced compliance, mentally resolving at the same time that it should be their last. During their walk, he took a malicious pleasure in forcing on the attention of his companion the various comments which they heard, and the objects they encountered, till the latter absolutely writhed under the affected kindness of his noble friend, who was so guarded in his expressions that he gave not the least opportunity for resenting it.

Close to the fellows' garden they encountered Digby and Fitzgerald. Lord Linton was the first to perceive them.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he exclaimed, as they passed him on the opposite side of the walk; "will ye na step over and feel our friend's pulse?"

The two friends bowed pointedly to his lordship, and passed on, without a glance of recognition to their host of the night before.

"Damn them!" muttered Darwin, with affected indifference, "let them go—poor spiritless hounds!"

"Very pointed, I must say," observed his lordship, with a quiet smile peeping at the corner of his mouth—"after such a handsome dinner, too! They have taken up the moralising trade, lad, since you laid it down. But come," he continued, observing the impatient air with which his companion listened to his comments, "we shall meet them in the next walk."

As they strolled along, several Johnians met them; and one observed to his friends, quite loud:

"Clever plan that of Trinity for shirking the horse duty—beats the minister off his own ground! Cow chaises will be all the vogue."

Lord Linton jogged his companion's arm.

"Pshaw! beneath my notice!" he replied—"poor devils of sizars!"

"Very true," said the peer; "we can afford to pass over the sneers of our inferiors. Tell the poor devils to get a fortune, as ye have done, by your wits, and then, perhaps, you may condescend to answer them."

"By my wits?" repeated Darwin. "I can't understand you. My fortune was left to me by my father."

"When ye were twenty-five," added Linton, poking him in the ribs; "when ye were twenty-five, mon; but ye have forestalled the old boy by your—weel, weel, I'll no be precise about the term—and that I call winning a fortune. Here comes Lord Harry."

The young gentleman met them at the very turn of the walk. There was no avoiding them. He bowed coldly to both.

"Have ye no been to visit our sick friend?" demanded Linton in a peculiar tone.

A dry negative was the only reply.

"Will you dine with us to-day?" demanded Darwin, determined to ascertain beyond a doubt his sentiments.

Lord Harry excused himself.

"A pre-engagement, perhaps," said Linton, whose spirit was in its element—mischief.

Lord Harry was a youth of too much spirit to avail himself of the excuse, which, under any circumstances, he would have done without hesitation.

"No, I have no prior engagement," he answered firmly, and without a single moment's hesitation.

Darwin inwardly cursed the officious interference of his friend, whose mischievous spirit thus prevented the possibility of an arrangement; for he had calculated much on the pliable temper of the young nobleman; and perhaps would have succeeded, had he been left time and opportunity: now both were compromised.

"May I, then, demand, my lord," said Darwin, "the reason of this extraordinary refusal? It is not long since you honoured my humble board."

"Darwin, I will be frank with you, for dissimulation is not my *forte*. It would ill befit a fellow like me to assume the moralist; but there are bounds to folly as well as vice, and when passed, the former degenerates into the latter. You last night read me a useful lesson. I never felt before how disgusting brutal obscenity could become, for I had never before listened to it from the lips of a hypocrite. If you are offended at my plainness, I can't help it. You have my card."

The speaker bowed to Lord Linton, and walked on.

"Weel, weel," exclaimed the Scot, quietly enjoying the expression of shame and rage in his companion's face, "that beats cock-fighting! Lord Harry a reprover of the sins of the world! We shall have him standing for proctor next!"

"It was all owing to your officiousness," said Darwin, pettishly. "He would have forgot the foolish affair in a week, and now he has compromised both himself and me. Will you take a message for me?"

"Willingly, provided it's neither a challenge nor another invitation to dinner."

"The former, certainly," said Darwin; "I must meet this affair promptly."

"Had ye no better, then, commence with those who gave you the first insult?" demanded the Scot, who was really much attached to Lord Harry. "Shoot Digby and Fitzgerald, and then it will be time enough to send a message to the other."

"No," answered his excited companion, "I have determined. I will call out Heartley."

"Then ye mun find another messenger," said the Scot, who trusted by the refusal to creep out of the acquaintance of the now contemptible Darwin; "for to speak plainly, I cannot say that I altogether approve of the line of conduct ye have shown; it's na such as I can lend my countenance to."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Darwin, bitterly incensed, almost to madness, by the last unexpected rebuff. "Your countenance! your countenance! Poor worm! do you imagine that I value it?"

"Since it is so valueless," replied the Scot, nettled at the contemptuous manner of the speaker, "I wonder ye were so anxious to secure it to cover your disgrace. Good morning."

"Stay, our walk is not yet ended. You remember the alternative."

"First come, first served," observed his lordship, coolly turning upon his heel. "Digby, Fitzgerald, and Lord Harry, have all insulted ye in my presence; when ye have redeemed your honour with them, it will be time enough to think of impugning mine."

And the wary Scot, chuckling at the tact with which he had extricated himself, walked haughtily away, leaving Darwin a prey to doubt, indecision, shame, and rage.

"Lord Harry!" exclaimed Linton, as he overtook him with several of the party of the preceding evening, "I have just had a pretty tilt on your account. The creature Darwin, I am thinking, is demented. He wanted me to bring you a challenge, but I refused, knowing that Digby and Fitzgerald had given him the cut direct before ye, and consequently had prior claim."

"You have acted very honourably," observed the last-named gentleman, who was of the party; "but I suspect Darwin will soon have something else than duelling to think of. The master is in a furious rage; the jest of the cow is known through the university. He threatens expulsion."

"Weel, weel, I for one ha' done wi' him. Is it certain the master will expel him? I am doubting if Speculative will no stand his friend."

"On the contrary," added a second, "it was Speculative who made the report. He encountered him on the back of the cow this morning, and described it all to the bishop. They say that his lordship's nose has been at an angle of forty-five ever since."

The prediction was right; Darwin received information from his private tutor that the offended dignitary would listen to no apology, but was resolved on his expulsion. As is usual in such cases, the sentence was intimated a few hours before being made public, in order to enable the offender to escape to Oxford before the arrival of the fatal letter to the sister university. Darwin jumped into a chaise, and reached Oxford before it.

Lord Linton, with his usual kindness, took care to forward the various squibs and caricatures which appeared on the occasion to the sister university, and in one or two letters given to particular friends gave more ample details, so that in a few weeks Darwin was as well known there as in the place he had quitted, and shunned in consequence.

That same evening Fitzgerald was indulging in a quiet stroll across the common, when his reveries were broken by the imploring accents of a female voice, half exhausted from distress and terror. He stopped. It proceeded from the opposite side of the hedge.

"Unhand me! pray unhand me, if you are a gentleman—if you are a man!"

"Nonsense, pretty one," replied a male voice; "I must have a kiss first!"

Our hero found his way through the thick hedge, and saw, to his astonishment, a young and beautiful girl, whose dress was that of a gentlewoman, struggling in the embrace of his old enemy, Lord Moreton, who, flushed with the wine which he had indulged in pretty freely at the fellows' table, despite her tears and almost frantic resistance, was endeavouring to ravish a kiss. The muslin neckerchief which veiled her bosom had been rudely torn aside; and the sight of her heaving charms had only increased the fierceness of his desire, the brutality of his passions. With a spring like the bound of a deer, our hero sprang between them, and in an instant released the trembling girl from further outrage. Moreton became livid with rage.

"Begone, ruffian!" exclaimed Fitzgerald; "lest passion takes the rein from reason and I chastise you as you deserve."

The infuriated nobleman, doubly excited by lust and disappointment, rushed upon Fitzgerald, who, embarrassed by the weight of the fair creature clinging to him for support, found it impossible to avoid the shock. He had, however, too cool a head and too quick an eye to permit himself to be taken at a disadvantage; he met the attack of his assailant with a blow which sent him reeling on the grass bleeding from both mouth and nostrils.

The *noble lord* was too much cowed by the chastisement he had received to renew the contest; the sense, too, of the disgraceful position in which he had placed himself had some influence on his retreat, which he made by quietly withdrawing into the wood, muttering curses as he went.

As yet our hero had never loved; woman had appeared to him but as some beauteous riddle, to be studied and solved perchance at leisure. He had seen, admired, and forgotten many of the fairy forms and beaming eyes which, like falling stars or dancing sunbeams, had flitted across his path, but left no

traces there. Sometimes he had wondered at his own coldness towards the sex, for in other matters he was warm and constitutionally enterprising.

It is curious to observe how women show their intuitive perception of character by the confidence with which, in the hour of danger, they cling to the manly and courageous arm. The rescued girl reclined with touching confidence upon her protector's breast, sobbing and panting like some frightened nestling beneath its mother's wing. As our hero gazed upon her in this half-insensible state, he felt that he had never gazed upon a lovelier face. Willing to spare her blushes when she should return to perfect consciousness, with a trembling hand he replaced the neckerchief over her snowy bosom, and as his fingers felt the contact with the living ivory, an electric shock darted through his whole frame; involuntarily he pressed her closer towards him, and felt that his heart beat almost as wildly, though with a different feeling, as her own.

'Where!—What has happened? Brother, is it you?" faltered the stranger, slowly opening her long-fringed eye-lids, and displaying a pair of the loveliest blue orbs that ever disturbed a student's rest, or gave inspiration to a poet's dream.

"Consider me as a brother," whispered Fitzgerald, in a soothing voice; "for you are as safe with me as with one. There is no danger now—the ruffian who insulted you has fled."

"I remember now!" exclaimed the girl, blushing deeply, and disengaging herself from his supporting arms, which seemed reluctant to release her; "that fearful man! Oh! sir, how can I thank you?"

"By alluding to it no more, and allowing me to conduct you towards your home."

The look which followed these few words more than repaid the speaker for the services to which she alluded; it seemed to thank him not only for the protection he had afforded in her need, but the delicacy which threw a veil over so embarrassing a subject.

"Where do you reside?"

The fair stranger pointed to a house on the road-side over the common, now known by the name of the Maid's Causeway.

He proffered his arm to conduct her. It was unhesitatingly accepted.

Ellen Rochfort was one of those lovely, graceful creatures who, like sunbeams, cross the path of life only to illume it. Nature had gifted her with that truly feminine style of beauty whose great charm lies in the veil of modesty which heightens but not conceals it. She and her only brother, one of the curates of St. Mary's, were both orphans; the latter, for two years past, had been slowly sinking to the grave, in the pride of intellect and manhood, a victim to consumption. It was only occasionally that he was enabled to do duty in his church, where his voice, once full and clear, sounded like an echo from a coffin. For several months past he had entirely abstained. Hitherto the brother and sister had lived but for each other; in the world, they were not of the world; and the deepest pang which the young clergyman felt at the prospect of his approaching dissolution was that his nurse, companion, and sister, would then become doubly an orphan.

The service which Gerald had rendered to the fair girl, as might naturally be supposed, led to an intimacy with the brother, at whose cottage he soon became a constant guest. The worn sufferer, fascinated by the mind, and grateful for the society of his guest, gradually came to look for his arrival as a thing of course, and evinced a slight degree of irritability if any thing occurred to detain him beyond the usual hour. Ellen—although she never expressed her impatience—looked as if she expected him too; for if the visits of her defender were pleasing to her brother, they were doubly so to her—in fact they had become necessary to her happiness. Ere she was aware of her danger, or suspected the existence of a stronger feeling than that of gratitude, the gentle creature loved. Hers was not the passion which, like the headlong torrent, dashes from rock to rock, leaping the bounds of prudence and virtue in its mad course; but calm and deep as the pure waters of some mountain lake, gently rippled by the breath of heaven. The impassioned declaration of Gerald first unveiled to her the nature of her feelings. She dreamt not that she loved until she found that the sentiment was mutual.

Despite the lessons of ambition which had been so carefully implanted in the breast of our hero, his heart was naturally good and generous. The idea of seduction never once crossed his mind, and yet he was one *whom circumstances might seduce.* Marriage was equally a stranger to his thoughts, for he was entirely dependent on his grandfather, whose pride would have revolted at the last hope of his race allying himself to the penniless sister of an undistinguished country curate. In this dreamy, uncertain state of existence our hero passed his time. Study was neglected, and even his friend Digby deserted for the society of Ellen and her brother, at whose cottage his evenings were generally passed, discussing metaphysics with the latter, and drinking intoxicating draughts of love as he gazed upon the blue eyes of the smiling, happy sister. Months had elapsed, winter had passed, and spring, like a bride arrayed in smiles and tears, coyly responded to the vows of earth, impatient of her kiss. The day had been a fine one; the breeze, fragrant with the breath of budding trees and gently opening flowers, like some overladen bee, swept lazily and luxuriantly across the common, as if weary with the weight of its own perfume. Gerald, who had just left the dining-hall, paused once or twice in his way to the curate's to inhale its fragrance; and it might have detained him longer, had not the recollection of the bright blue eyes of Ellen, and the smile of welcome which awaited him at the cottage, urged him to renew his footsteps.

"Speak low," said Ellen, as he entered the house; "poor William sleeps, his cough has been terrible all the day, and it is only within this half hour that he has enjoyed the least repose."

Gerald seated himself by her side, and, taking her hand, silently kissed it. Raising his eyes to hers, he saw that they were filled with tears, and asked, in a voice like the low deep note of the cooing dove, to confide in him her cause of sorrow.

A glance towards the door leading to her dying brother's chamber was the mute reply. Gerald understood it; he felt that, in a few months—nay, days, perhaps—she would be alone in the world; the staff on which she had leaned through life removed. The picture was a desolate one.

"At least, Ellen," he whispered, "I shall be with you. 'Tis true that, for the present, I am dependent on my grandfather's caprice, and, by my own energies, must obtain a position, ere I can entertain the hope to call you mine. In another year I take my degree. Should my anticipations be realised, then Ellen——"

A sigh was the only answer. The desolate girl felt that long before that year of expectation had expired she would be alone upon the earth, doubly an orphan.

"On my entrance into life," resumed the young man, "my grandfather has promised to settle a certain portion of his fortune on me; his allowance, 'tis true, at present is most liberal to me, but uncertain."

"Does love require so much?" murmured the fair girl, turning upon him at the same time a glance which might have melted the resolution of an anchorite, and which Gerald returned by one of such intense and sudden passion, that in an instant her neck and face became suffused with blushes, and her eyes sought the ground in delicious confusion.

"I must speak to your brother of this," said her lover, at the same time gently letting fall his arm from the back of the chair till it encircled her waist. It was the first time that he had done so; and he felt her heart beat wildly beneath the gentle pressure of his hand. "Could you, Ellen," he demanded, "be content to share an undistinguished destiny—to tread the humble path of life, when nature has adorned thee for its bright one?"

"With thee," replied the trembling maid, "a desert were a paradise! What were the world if I possessed thy smile—or what were life without it?"

Gerald repaid the frank avowal by one of those looks which memory graves upon the youthful heart, to treasure there for ever. Involuntarily he drew her unresisting form to his, and their lips met in one long delicious kiss of love, so pure and deep that it drew the life's warm current from their youthful hearts to reanimate it with all its wildest passions. Existence to both became, as it were, a dream; their breath came thick and heavy; a voluptuous languor seized on the limbs of the half-fainting girl, whilst Etna's burning lava glowed in his.

"Leave me, Gerald," she sobbed, but without offering the slightest resistance; "for Heaven's sake leave me!"

A second kiss, which thrilled to her very soul, was the reply. The innocent creature was like a blind girl tottering on the edge of a precipice; a step further, and she had fallen. The being whom she adored was by her side, his heart beating madly against hers, his blood on fire, and every nerve strung by

unreined passion; nor was it till she felt that his daring hand had invaded the modest kerchief which shielded her swelling bosom that she found sufficient strength to rise from the seat on which she half reclined, and gently push him from her. Bursting into a flood of tears, she exclaimed:

"For the honour of her who bore you, respect me, Gerald! Save me from myself!"

But our hero was too much excited to listen to the voice of reason, or the appeal to his generosity. Again his eager arms encircled her, and her struggles became less and less resolute while folded in the embrace of the man she loved; when heaven, to prevent the sacrifice of so much innocence and virtue, sent its guardian angel to her relief. The door of the apartment was suddenly opened, and her brother, more than usually pale,—for he had overheard a portion of what passed,—stood before them. The exhausted Ellen sank upon a seat, whilst Gerald, like a confounded guilty thing, stood before his outraged friend. It was the first time he had ever blushed at meeting the gaze of any human being, and his proud spirit was humiliated.

"I thought," exclaimed the dying man, "the bitterness of death had passed; but find a sister's weakness and a friend's dishonour were wanting to complete it. Begone!" he added, in a voice to which indignation gave unusual strength. "Serpent, quit the paradise you would have stained—the roof you would have dishonoured. Oh! Ellen, Ellen!"

Heartbroken at the tone of reproach in which her name was uttered, the still weeping creature sank upon her knees and kissed the struggling hand of him who, even in death, watched over her.

"Hear me!" exclaimed the culprit, recovering from his confusion. "I only am to blame."

"Begone!"

"We love," added the guilty friend.

"Love!" iterated the curate. "Oh! man, man! Friendship is violated — honour sacrificed — purity which angels might have smiled to gaze upon, sullied at the shrine of lawless passion, and the perpetrator's excuse is love!"

"Hear me!" continued Gerald. "Let not a moment's weakness close thy heart to the voice of friendship or the cry of innocence. Angels have fallen; we only have been tempted. We love; Heaven hath created us for each other. Ellen may soon need a protector. Thou art a priest of Him whose will is mercy, and not sacrifice; thy ministry can legitimatise our passion. Give me this very hour a husband's right. The brother may pardon where the friend condemns. Restore me to myself—my own esteem and thy confiding heart. Kneel with me, Ellen," he continued, "join thy prayer with mine, and he will not resist it."

The still kneeling Ellen raised her eyes, and fixed them with an imploring glance upon her brother; she felt that marriage alone could restore her to her own esteem, to her lover's affection and respect; for although still pure as the virgin snow upon the mountain's crest, the breath of passion had passed over her.

Despite his love for his sister, and the natural desire he felt not to leave her without a protector in the trials and temptations of the world, the curate hesitated; he knew that such a marriage, although strictly legal, rendered him liable to the censure of his superiors for celebrating it at an uncanonical hour; but the impulse of his heart prevailed over every other consideration.

"Be it so," he at last replied, "and may He who reads His servant's heart forgive him if he err. Love her," he added, turning to our hero, who, happy in the consciousness that his atonement was complete, now met his gaze; "be to her all a husband should be—all," he added, "that her brother would have been, had he been permitted to watch over her."

The young couple who kept the curate's house, and who were devotedly attached both to him and his sister, were speedily summoned to the apartment, and in their presence the rite which made Ellen a wife, and the impetuous, but not ungenerous, Fitzgerald a husband, was completed.

Two certificates were written, and signed by the curate, the bride and bridegroom, and the witnesses: one was entrusted to the humble but faithful servants, with a strict injunction *never to part with it;* the other was placed by the curate in the hands of the agitated Ellen.

"Guard it," he exclaimed, kindly to her, "as you would your honour—the memory of a dying brother. When I am in the grave, it will be a memorial that I fulfilled our parents' trust, and to the gasp of life watched over you. Lead me to my room," he added; "the excitement of this scene has exhausted me. I feel I have not many days to live."

His weeping sister, and the bridegroom, to whom the speaker was now perfectly reconciled, assisted him to his chamber, knelt by his bedside and prayed with him, till a sleep, as calm and peaceful as an angel's slumber, stole over him. A thousand burning blushes stole over the cheek of Ellen as her husband led her from the room.

"You will be late in college," she observed to him, as soon as they reached the study of the curate, which separated her bedchamber from her brother's; "good night," she added, "and away at once."

"I shall not return to college to-night," whispered Gerald, encircling her trembling form in his manly arms. This time it was with a husband's right.

"Oh! Gerald, you must despise me for my weakness."

The warm kisses of her bridegroom reassured her, as she sank almost fainting in his embrace. The adoring Gerald bore her in his triumphant arms into the chamber.

Here let the chaste Hymen throw his saffron mantle over the tender mysteries of the nuptial couch, our readers, like guests invited to the marriage, having accompanied them to the door of the chamber.

Fitzgerald's first care was to obtain permission to reside out of college, which, as he was known to be a reading man, was easily obtained; and his whole time, much to the discontent of his friends, was passed with his young bride, to whom he became, as her mind gradually unfolded itself, more and more attached. For many reasons it was decided that his marriage should, for a while, remain a secret; and Ellen, with that devotion which woman's heart alone is capable of, was content to endure the vulgar stare and the inquiring glance of those whom they frequently encountered in their walks, with patience. Digby alone, of all our hero's friends, ventured to question him upon the nature of his relations with the fair girl who hung so tenderly upon his arm, when by accident he met them in his solitary rambles; but even to his intimate friend Fitzgerald returned a cold reply, and a gradual estrangement was the consequence. The cynic looked on him as a heartless seducer—the character, perhaps, he most abhorred—and secretly pitied the supposed victim of his friend's lawless passions.

About two months after the marriage, the worthy curate died, his last smile directed to his weeping sister, whose hand he placed in his friend's, as he rendered up his pure soul to the Being whom he served and trusted. His end, like that of all good men, was peace.

The change which, soon after the loss of her brother, became apparent in the figure of Ellen, indicated that she would soon become a mother, and she carefully confined herself to the house. She had several times met Lord Moreton in her walks, and although the constant presence of her husband protected her from any direct insult, his ironical sneers were more than she could bear. An instinctive aversion told her that he was her enemy, and she shuddered with a vague presentiment of evil whenever she encountered him. The peer, who was one of those men who never forgive, or desist from a pursuit where their evil passions are engaged, set every engine at work to discover the nature of her relation with Fitzgerald, whom he hated as bad men only hate. The indiscreet zeal of her two servants, who were goaded by the insinuations of a party set on by his lordship for the purpose, at last revealed to him that she was the wife of his enemy.

"Good!" he exclaimed, when he heard the intelligence; "my revenge will be the sweeter."

From that hour he spared neither expense or villany to accomplish his design.

The hour at last arrived which made our hero the father of a son. Oh! with what tender love he thanked the young mother for the gift, and thought, as he gazed upon the little stranger, that its dead uncle's spirit blessed it and watched over it. Perhaps he was not in error.

The period for his examination arrived about three months after the birth of his son. To say that Fitzgerald's heart did not beat quicker when the morning for entering the Senate House, and which was either to blight his hopes or crown them with success, arrived, would be wrong. As for the last twelvemonth he had been held a non-reading man, no very favourable anticipations were entertained by his friends. To their astonishment, however, he distanced all competitors, and came out senior wrangler and medallist. That day was a happy one with him and Ellen.

But if he felt proud of his success, his grandfather was still more so. "My dream will soon be realised," exclaimed the old man, as he paced the floor of his study with the welcome letter which contained the intelligence in his hand. "The star of my house is rising: let me but live to see it fairly above the horizon, and Fortune I acquit thee of the past."

Although so long absent from England, Radcliff had still a few friends upon whom he fancied he could rely, and, much as his pride revolted at the idea of asking a favour, he determined on making the sacrifice for the advancement of his grandson, who was ordered forthwith to meet him in London.

The first sorrow which Ellen had experienced since the death of her brother was the intended separation from her husband. Vainly he attempted to soothe her by a thousand endearments; his words, his reasonings, his brilliant anticipations of the future, fell upon a deaf ear, for the heart refused to be convinced.

"As soon as I have seen my grandfather and my position becomes defined," whispered Gerald as he kissed away her tears, "I will return to you, not to separate again. It is but a passing cloud," he added, "which obscures the sunshine of our happiness; it will seem the brighter from the contrasts."

The following day he tore himself from her arms, and consigned her to her humble but faithful friends, with a thousand injunctions to watch over her and her infant treasure. Little did he think the kiss he pressed upon her lips was doomed to be the last.

CHAPTER VIII.

Why have you rung these devils' matins
In my startled ear?

THE meeting between Fitzgerald and his grandfather was as cold and formal as though no stronger tie than that of guardian and ward existed between them. The Jacobite sighed as the young man merely touched his hand.

"It is not thus," he thought, "that we should have met; but no matter: what is the sacrifice of the heart's weak impulse to the achievement of the mind's fixed purpose? Gerald may never comprehend my character; but I will not repine, so he fulfils his destiny."

His grandson, meanwhile, had taken a seat, expecting the elder would commence the conversation by informing him why he had sent for him to London, and what path he fixed on for him to pursue.

"You doubtless expect, Fitzgerald, from the brevity of my summons," he at length began, "that I have some decided purpose to communicate. Is not that the fact?"

The young man bowed, to intimate that such were his expectations.

"I regret," resumed the speaker, "that such is not the case; the path by which you must enter on the world's busy scenes has still to be discovered. I had trusted that a parliamentary career would have been opened to you; but the prejudice of the royal despot against our family is as unrelenting as ever, and such a step would excite his jealousy and suspicion,—both, if possible, to be avoided, though how, I am at a loss to advise, unless"—here he paused, as if unwilling to unfold his thoughts.

Fitzgerald spoke not, but fixed an inquiring eye upon his grandfather.

"Unless," resumed the old man, "you will be content to enter society without family or name—merely as Mr. Fitzgerald—all mention of your descent from me for awhile forgotten. Your path must be that of the mole, instead of the flight of the eagle; but bear in mind," he added, "that it leads to success—to all that your dreams have ever pictured. Every other avenue to the restoration of the honours of our house is closed."

"That can scarcely be, I fear," replied the listener; "my name and descent are already too well known at the university to render concealment possible. My friends——"

"Friends!" interrupted the old man, in a sharp tone, indicative both of surprise and scorn; "I did not expect such weakness from my—I almost blush to say—my pupil. Think you that the butterfly acquaintances of college will remember any thing less foolish than themselves? Friends! they are the coin with which men gull the world—the pass-word to deceit and treachery. Interest may bind mankind together, revenge or hatred, but friendship never!"

The speaker must have endured some hard lessons ere he jumped to such conclusions.

It was seldom that an emotion approximating to passion was permitted to display itself in the bearing or words of Richard Radcliff, and his grandson was

proportionately surprised at his unusual vehemence. Something extraordinary, he felt convinced, must have occurred to ruffle the almost invariable quiet of his grandfather's disposition.

"You thought not always thus, my dear sir," said Fitzgerald; "may not the many disappointments of life have prejudiced your otherwise clear judgment?"

"You say truly, boy; I thought not always thus," replied the old Jacobite, with deep and painful emotion. "When young, the heart is unarmed, and unable to wrestle with the treachery of mankind, because it does not suspect it. It is full of mistaken confidence and hope, and too trusting in the integrity and sincerity of human nature; but it is a dream, which a little experience soon awakens us from—treachery and baseness destroy the illusion. Yet," he added, with a deep-drawn sigh, and mingled recollections of good and evil flashed across his mind, "it is a pleasing dream, though man's fallen nature cannot realise it."

"Surely in one instance you have been fortunate in the selection of a friend. Heartley——"

"Is like the rest of the human race," interrupted Radcliff; "and I was an idiot to judge him better. We must depend upon ourselves if we would avoid the arrows of disappointment."

"I had always understood," observed Fitzgerald, "that his lordship was under obligations of no trifling nature to our family; can he have forgotten them?"

"His lordship's memory is weak," replied his grandfather, scornfully, "or perhaps I overrate the claim. Nobility conferred upon his mushroom family, at the intercession of mine, to say nothing of the concealment—the honourable concealment—even at the price of life, of a correspondence which would have sent his father to the block, stained with the blood of so many better men. Trifles—trifles," he added, his lip curling with still more scornful indignation; "yet they might have weighed with some minds in granting so slight a favour."

"How, sir? has Heartley refused any request of yours?" demanded the young man, his colour rising with indignation. "I deeply regret that you should have exposed yourself to such an insult, especially if, as I suspect, the favour was solicited on my account."

"Refused!" repeated Radcliff "Oh, no, his lordship is too skilful a tactitian to refuse. His game was to make the thing appear impossible. I hinted that the seat for his borough, which at his word his valet or cook might fill, would be a favourable opening in life for you. And what think you was his reply? His word was passed to Mr. Wavering, the present member—to that automaton who exists only at his pleasure, says ay or no but at his patron's orders, trembles to go to a division without his commands, and votes the slavery of the people, the dishonour of the country, for a mess of pottage. The second seat was for his son—natural enough—I blame not that."

"Perhaps," said his grandson, whose knowledge of mankind was gathered more from books than men, "his word might have been really pledged."

"I too might have thought so, had I not still further fathomed his hollow professions by alluding to the contesting of the county, which had formerly been debated between us. This drew from him the secret of his first refusal; the king would not be pleased at seeing any of my family holding a seat in the Lower House. I might have reminded him that their voices were heard in the legislature long before the German mongrels filched the crown they wear; but pshaw!" he added, impatiently stamping his foot upon the floor, chafed at the recollection of the interview, "let us dismiss the reptile from our minds!"

A pause of some moments ensued, at the end of which the young man demanded of the speaker what were his present views.

"Undetermined," answered his grandfather. "I have one, and I believe a true, friend left—Lord Bamff. If his influence be not very great, his inclination to serve me will make amends. Of his sincerity I cannot doubt. I shall see him in the course of the day, and we will consult together for the future. Perhaps you had better not see him till a second visit. He is a Scot, cautious, though honourable; he will be frank with me alone."

Fitzgerald and the speaker parted; the latter to call upon the peer, the former to write to his adored Ellen, whom absence rendered doubly dear, and from whom his grandfather's commands, and the ambitious yearnings of his heart, alone could have separated him even for a moment.

For several days after Radcliff's visit to Lord Bamff, the old man maintained a gloomy silence; but it did not escape the penetration of his grandson that he was meditating some important point within himself. At length, one morning, when Fitzgerald, as was his usual practice, was about retiring from the breakfast table, while the old man read his letters, he requested him to remain.

"You have doubtless been surprised at my continued silence," he began; "but I have carefully been revolving in my mind a project which presents something like the prospect of an opening for you—although not a very brilliant one—if you have patience to attempt it."

"You know how far I possess that necessary qualification," replied the young man. "If the undertaking be feasible, I will not shrink from it."

"It is the best we can suggest. You know Erringcourt?"

"The pompous peer, whom politicians name the weathercock? Yes."

"He has influence, although a fool," resumed Radcliff. "He has applied to my friend Bamff to recommend to him a young man as secretary. His lordship has the patronage of three boroughs, which gives him a certain interest with the ministers."

"Am I to understand that his lordship is pledged to return me to Parliament for one of these said boroughs?" demanded Fitzgerald, who was not altogether satisfied with the arrangement.

"That he declines doing till after an acquaintance—a decision for which you cannot really blame him. But," added the speaker, "there is an opening, and that, to one of your talent, is a great point gained. The peer is selfish, vain, proud, and weak; it will be your own fault if you do not render yourself indispensable to him. A character so feeble must be assailable on all sides—his weakness must be made your strength—his influence the stepping-stone to your ambition."

"I understand you, sir, and accept the proposal, dreary as it is. When am I to see his lordship?"

"Early in the ensuing week, when he is expected in town to oppose the address; for, as you doubtless are aware, he is in the opposition. In the interim, if you have no other engagement, Lord Bamff, whose advice and future services may be of the utmost value to you, will be glad to see you; his dinner hour is at six. Shall I say in my note, signifying your acceptance of Lord Erringcourt's offer, that he may expect you?"

The young man bowed acquiescence, and leaving his

grandfather to write his letter, strolled into the park to meditate upon his future prospects.

Six o'clock found him punctual to his engagement at Lord Bamff's, by whom he was courteously received. His lordship was a gaunt, hard-featured Scotchman, and a martyr to the gout. To Gerald's surprise his grandfather had not arrived.

"You thought to have met Derwentwater, na doubt," said his lordship, as he hobbled before his guest into the dining-room, where only two covers were laid.

"If your lordship means my grandfather," answered the young man, who was not used to hearing him so designated, "I certainly understood that we should meet here."

"Who the devil else, bairn, think you, I should mean? but I need not tell a quick, sensible, clever lad like you, that my friend has a few crotchets in his head—no but what he is canny. He wished me to give you a little advice, but couldna stand the hearing of it himsel'; his stomach's o'er high for that, I guess, puir man—weel, weel"

The shrewd caustic speaker was not far wrong; the high-spirited Radcliff shrank with painful sensitiveness from listening to the counsel which his well-meaning friend, in the kindness of his nature and knowledge of the world, would be sure to proffer.

The dinner, which was plain though excellent, passed off in silence. As soon as the dessert was placed upon the table the servants withdrew.

"Hang on the baize door," exclaimed the peer to the butler as he was quitting the room, "and do ye hear, let some claret—thirty six—be put in ice."

The speaker, who was a *bon vivant*, knew the number of every bin in his cellar. The door was speedily arranged to his satisfaction, and the butler withdrew.

"Now, that's what I call comfortable," said the gouty old man, as he arranged his legs on an easy stool; "that baize door shuts out all listeners—the cursed propensity of English servants; not that mine are the worst in the world. And now," he continued, "Mr. Fitzgerald, here's to your success in life, and no fear of ye gin ye fellow the track steadily."

His visitor thanked him for his good wishes, and the interest which he had shown towards him in the arrangement with Lord Erringcourt.

"Ye'll no name it, my lad," replied his host, "ye'll no name it; we share the same bluid, and that wi' Highlanders, ye ken, is no weak tie. After all, the advantage mun be made by yourself—it's no hanging like a ripe cherry, ready to drop into your mouth."

"I doubt not but that by zeal and assiduity," began Fitzgerald—but a shrill and peculiar whistle on the part of his host stopped him, and they remained gazing for a few minutes on each other in silence—the young man astonished at the interruption, and the old peer eyeing his guest with his keen grey eyes as if he would read his very soul.

"Zeal and assiduity," iterated the Scot—"vera proper, na doubt; but it's no your game, I'm thinking. Come, we mun be frank wi' each other; and as, in decency bound, the elder ought to set the example, I'll begin. If you have no better ideas than zeal and assiduity, Lord Erringtou's is no the opportunity. They are sterling qualities, na doubt, but they are, I fear, very rarely properly valued. Virtue, they say, is its own reward; and take my word for it, I believe it, for it rarely meets with any other. Now, if this appointment is to prove a stepping-stone to fortune for ye, lad, you must have the eye of a hawk and the scent of a bloodhound. Your own advancement must be continually before your eyes, to the exclusion of every other object; even," he added, slowly, "if the fall of him who trusts you be the price. It is by the difficulties into which the idiot is daily plunging himself that you must make your way—seeming to extricate, but in reality plunging him in still deeper. Then, when he is compromised with all parties, turn on him boldly and demand your price."

Fitzgerald's ethics were not of the purest order where ambition was concerned, but even he was startled at the bold, unprincipled course marked out for him by his host, who, after having finished his advice, sat coolly eyeing him to see what effect it had produced.

"There is much worldly wisdom, doubtless," observed our hero, "in your lordship's counsel; but is it such as I can follow? the violation of mutual confidence is——"

"Mutual confidence!" almost roared the peer, "ha! ha! ha! And what confidence," he demanded, with a bitter sneer, "do you think will exist between you and the proud Earl of Erringcourt? God save me! but I think my auld friend Derwentwater has mistaken your spirit! I tell you, young man, that your patron and employer—ay, you may colour at the word—will look upon you as his purchased property as much as his horse or dog. Intellect, time, the sacrifice of youthful spirit, all will be his. But then he will be polite to you—oh! very polite! You have yet to learn the pain which follows the civility of a great man to his dependant. Were it possible that your relations with him should be of a different nature, I would be the last man in the world, much as I feel interested in your success, to bid you purchase it by such means."

His lordship spoke with considerable warmth and bitterness. Born a younger brother, he had tasted in early life the bitter cup of dependence, and it had left its gall upon his lips. Fitzgerald observed, too, that, when excited, not the least trace of his northern accent remained.

"It is, indeed, a gloomy picture that you have drawn, my lord; but if my destiny, I must endeavour to bear it patiently. I have ever held regret to be the most useless feeling of the human heart: with me it shall be the last."

"Wisely determined, lad," said his host, resuming his Scotch dialect; "there needs na mair words about it. I think we understand each other. Now, then, to gi' ye an insight into Erringcourt's character. Imprimis, he has, like maist weak men, an inordinate pride of rank, and after a' the family was not ennobled till the reign of Elizabeth. There are families," added his lordship, unconsciously falling into the error he reprobated, "wha date their nobility fra the eighth century, and yet are no continually boasting of it either."

Fitzgerald inwardly smiled as he noticed the inconsistency.

"Then the creature fancies himself a statesman," continued the speaker, with a low chuckle; "the de'il himself might laugh at the blunders he has made; the fule compares himself to Richelieu, when, in sober truth, he mair resembles a monntebank."

"You have given me a difficult mind to deal with," replied his guest; "irregular and knotted, would form your description—I could add generous or estimable."

"The more skill will be shown in meeting the difficulties."

"It shall not be my fault," observed Fitzgerald, "if I do not accommodate myself to his lordship's

disposition. I'll be as pliant as he is changeable."

"By my soul, then, lad, but ye'll be another Proteus! for a greater weathercock than your patron that is to be never yet existed. So much for him. Now for the next, or perhaps the maist important personage in the family—his wife. The countess is a shrewd, clever woman, with a talent for intrigue which would render her a match for the devil, did not the vanity of her sex frequently blind her judgment. Hitherto her reputation stands above the breath of slander, and yet she has stood, ere now, upon the brink of a precipice. A woman so fond of adulation," he added, "must fall at last. I need not point out to you," he continued, with a glance of peculiar meaning, "the advantage of securing, if possible, *by any means*, an interest in that quarter. She is likely to be taken with a showy person. Do you sing?"

"Not well," replied our hero, colouring to the temples at the evident bearing of the speaker's advice, which his love for Ellen, if not his principles, made him shrink from with disgust.

"And dance, and play?" continued his host.

The young man bowed his head in the affirmative.

"You have been wiser than your grandfather," said his lordship, "who informed me that in his system of education all trivial accomplishments had been rejected. Many a man's fortune has been made or marred by a bow. Mazarine danced, although a cardinal, to obtain the favour of Ann of Austria: the lightly judging censured him, the wise applauded him, for his knowledge of the sex. The countess must be your Ann of Austria; dance, bow, sing, or any thing else that may please her."

"Has his lordship any family?" demanded Fitzgerald.

"Two infant children — girls, I believe—and a maiden sister, whose fortune she holds in trust, and the world says, would find it inconvenient to pay it. The last secretary was discharged — I beg pardon, dismissed—because Lady Penelope and he were too intimate to suit his lordship's views."

"Surely he was not so imprudent as to trifle with the lady, or attempt any intrigue?"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Lord Bamff; "you are a greenhorn, with all your study and wit. But a little experience will improve you. No; the fool's attempt was *honourable*," added the peer, marking the word with a peculiar emphasis. "Had it been a mere intrigue, Erringcourt would have shut his eyes. It was a honourable union that he feared."

Gerald was silent. He was at first shocked, but at last became greatly amused by the frankness of his host, his shrewd sarcastic observations, and knowledge of mankind. He must have studied, he thought, in a strange school, to have thus drawn from it such opinions, and such principles. His lordship read, or rather guessed, his thoughts.

"You think me a strange old fellow, Mr. Fitzgerald —perhaps I am so. You must remember, however, though we never met till to-day, that the tie of blood is between us, and that your grandfather was my earliest friend. Many men who think as I do wear morality on their lips as a mask to conceal it. With me the necessity for dissimulation is past, for my dream of life is all but ended. But come," he continued, "shall I treat you as an old acquaintance, and indulge in my usual nap—I am tired of talking—or will you avail yourself of an old man's infirmity, and take your parting bow?"

Fitzgerald took the hint, which was too good-humouredly given to be offensive, and rising, said:

"I will no longer encroach upon your lordship's time, or prevent your enjoying your usual sleep, which habit I dare say has made as necessary as —" He hesitated for the word.

"My bottle of claret," added the peer, closing the sentence for him; "right, lad, and now that we perfectly understand each other, let there be no unnecessary ceremony."

"When am I to see your lordship again?"

"Oh! I will send you the letter of introduction to Erringcourt in the morning, which will spare you the trouble of another visit," replied Lord Bamff. "But," he added, seeing that his guest was not altogether satisfied with the reply, "I am, thanks to the gout, generally at home. Come at any time when I can be of use to you."

"And only then?" demanded the young man, with a smile.

"Why, out upon thee for an ungrateful loon!" exclaimed the peer, laughingly. "Wouldst practise my own lessons against me? Flatter a gouty old fellow that his society can be any thing but an intolerable bore to a young spirit?"

Fitzgerald's hand was placed upon the door to depart.

"Stay," continued his lordship; "let me act honestly by you. My estates are entailed; therefore——"

"It is useless my acting the fortune-hunter to obtain them."

"Exactly so." said Lord Bamff, pleased with his guest's frankness. "And now that you have nothing to expect beyond the chat of a gouty old man, a moderate dinner, a bottle of good wine, and a hearty welcome in the devil's name, come when you will."

Our hero laughingly accepted the general invitation, thus strangely given, and made his bow to the invalid peer.

CHAPTER IX.

The coward's courage rises to revenge,
The brave man's to forgiveness.

"As soon as you have read this, post down to Cambridge, and drive direct to my chambers in Trinity. I shall require your services in an affair of importance. It is necessary that you should appear as a gentleman of the old school, and sink the lawyer. I shall expect you by to-morrow, at the latest. You may draw the leases as you suggested, and bring the money with you.

MORETON."

"Moreton! umph!" muttered Prim, as he removed the spectacles from his nose, after having twice perused the letter; "his lordship seems very anxious; some fresh piece of villany, no doubt; but he pays well," he added, rubbing his hands, "and young men will be young men."

Since his last interview with Gipsy George, when he had so cleverly checkmated him, the lawyer had led comparatively a quiet life; nothing more exciting than the general chicanery of his profession—the usual amount of ruin, robbery, cruelty, and oppression, having taken place. His active mind absolutely longed for an enlarged sphere of action, for he was never so much in his element as when mixed up in some dark intrigue, and the letter of Lord Moreton came as an absolute relief to him. His arrangements were soon made, and early on the following morning he started for the university.

Little did the unsuspecting Ellen dream, as she clasped her infant to her breast, and sighed at the absence of its father, of the foul plot laid against her happiness and honour. At times the recollection of Moreton's dark smile when he encountered her would fall like a shadow on her young soul, dimming its joyousness; but, with an effort, she shook off the impression. "What," she asked herself, "could she have to fear?" In her innocence she little knew how fierce are the cravings of revenge, or that man becomes more relentless than the wolf, more cunning than the serpent, when the slave of its fell influence.

She was seated in the parlour of her little cottage facing the common, her soft blue eyes at times fixed upon the fleecy clouds sailing across the heavens, or bent, with the unutterable tenderness of a mother's love, upon the sleeping cherub which lay nestled on her fragrant breast. Sometimes she would smile as her busy imagination pictured a happy future—a home such as love and youth picture in their waking dreams; or a tear fell on her changing cheek, and an involuntary shudder chilled her frame as the apprehension of some undefined danger crept, like a lengthening shadow, over her.

She was roused, at last, by the sound of a chaise, which stopped at the door of the cottage. Her heart beat wildly. Could it be Gerald? She had not received a letter from him for two days. Had he abstained from writing for the pleasure of surprising her? Her doubts were soon ended; for a venerable-looking personage, dressed in deep mourning, stepped from the carriage, and inquired for her by name.

He was shown into the room where she was sitting.

"Mrs. Fitzgerald," he said, bowing with a cold, stately air.

Ellen was embarrassed; she had promised her husband never to claim the name of wife unless at his request; her eyes became filled with tears at the humiliating position in which she was placed, and she could merely curtsey in reply.

"I know," said her visitor, in a voice which sounded even kindly, "all that has occurred between you and my grandson. But fear not; at my years, so near the grave, I have not travelled thus far to reproach you, especially as I am menaced with a loss which may leave my old age desolate."

"Mr. Radcliff!" exclaimed Ellen, sinking on her knees, for she doubted not but she beheld the grandfather of Gerald; "do you indeed forgive us? Oh! what a weight has one kind word removed from my worn heart! Grant us your blessing, sir," she added, sinking on her knee and kissing his hand as she spoke; "bless the mother of your last descendant."

She removed the veil with which she had shaded the eyes of her slumbering child, and placed the boy in his arms.

"Bless thee, sweet babe!" exclaimed the supposed grandfather, at the same time bestowing upon it the apostate Judas's kiss; "I bless thee as the last descendant of my blood—the pledge of my reconciliation with my grandchild!"

A tear absolutely glistened on the old rascal's eye as he pronounced the words. It must at least be admitted that Prim—for it was no other than the lawyer—was an excellent actor.

Cautiously he proceeded to unfold his purpose, which was no other than to allure the unsuspecting victim from the protection of her home, that she might the more easily become the prey of his unprincipled employer. He began by gently informing her that a duel had taken place between Fitzgerald and Lord Moreton, in which the latter had been so dangerously wounded that his life was despaired of.

"And my husband?" demanded the terrified Ellen.

"Is safe, at least for the present," replied the villain; "but should a fatal termination ensue, he must for a while quit England; at present he is hid with a sure friend. In his despair he has confided to me his perhaps too hasty marriage. He is the solace of my age," continued the old man, "the hope of my race. I will not deny that at first I felt justly indignant at his want of confidence, but this sweet boy has made amends for all."

Again the deceived gratified mother kissed the dissembler's hand.

"You must return with me to London," he resumed. "Gerald, despite the pressing danger of his position, refuses to quit England without you. Hasten your preparations then. Let me not lose the last stay of my declining age—the prop of my falling house!"

All this was so naturally told, and the character of the stately old grandfather so cleverly assumed, that Ellen believed implicitly in every word. Her preparations were soon made, and that very evening she left the cottage, where she had passed the most blissful moments of her short existence, in company with the lawyer, who acted up to his pretended relationship to the last by carrying the innocent cherub upon his knee, and lavishing upon it those attentions so pleasing to a mother's heart.

Ellen had never been in London. As the chaise whirled through the crowded streets at an early hour the following morning, she felt bewildered and confused. From Gerald's description, she had always understood that Mr. Radcliff resided in one of the squares in the metropolis; she was surprised, therefore, when she found that, instead of stopping in any of the streets that they passed through, the chaise continued its progress towards Blackheath.

"I thought," she anxiously observed, "that your residence was in London, sir."

"And so my general residence is," replied the ready Prim; "but it is sure to be too closely watched to render it prudent for us to alight there. I have a small country house in the neighbourhood, where your arrival will cause no suspicion, and where my unfortunate grandson may securely visit you. We must be prudent," he added, "when the liberty—nay, perhaps the life—of those we love is at stake."

There was so much probability in this—so much of the heart's prudence in the seeming caution, that the half-awakened mistrust was laid at rest again.

On the road leading from Blackheath to Charlton was an old-fashioned house standing in its enclosed grounds, the property of the perfidious Lord Moreton, the scene of many of his pleasures and his crimes; indeed, he seldom visited it unless when he had some victim to deceive, some scene of violence to perpetrate; for, although so young, he was an adept in villany. Two or three old servants, whose respectable appearance might have blinded suspicion's self, formed the household. They had been trained to their office by the late lord, who had been as worthless a libertine as his son, and cared not, provided they were well paid, to what scheme of infamy they lent their aid. As the chaise stopped at the door of the mansion, a grey-headed old man, having all the appearance of a butler, opened the door, whilst his wife, in a neat cap and muslin apron, stood curtseying upon the threshold. The heart of Ellen felt reassured at the benevolence of their appearance.

"Welcome, my dear child!" exclaimed Prim, pol

uting her fair brow at the same time with a kiss; "welcome to your future home! Lawrence," he added, turning to the man, "let breakfast be instantly served; and let your wife conduct my granddaughter to her apartment."

The old lady overwhelmed the unsuspecting victim with those fussy attentions which attached servants love to lavish upon the children of the house where they so long have served, and whom they love as if they were their own. The detestable hypocrite *would* carry the baby, as she led the confiding Ellen to a large handsomely-furnished chamber on the second floor, opening with glass doors upon the leads of the mansion, adorned with statues in lead, and rows of plants in old-fashioned vases, ranged chiefly round a large skylight which lit the principal staircase. Here she left her for a few moments to herself whilst breakfast was being prepared; directly after which, the lawyer returned to town to inform his worthless employer that his commands had been obeyed.

"'Tis well," exclaimed Lord Moreton, his eyes flashing in the anticipated triumph of his unmanly vengeance. "We must, if possible, keep up the delusion to the last. You will return to her again, and state that it is impossible that Gerald should visit her for the present, but that in the morning she may expect him."

"And in the morning?" said the lawyer, inquiringly.

"Long ere it dawns," replied his lordship, "she shall have been mine. I will sate my hatred of her husband in her dishonour; the raging passion she has excited in my breast within her trembling arms. Doubtless," he added, with a smile, for the contemplation pleased him, "she will be outrageously desperate at first—most women are so—but time soon reconciles them to the man who has once possessed their person."

Before returning to Blackheath, Prim, like a careful man of business, visited his office, for it was term time, and he had many delicate matters in hand, clients to defend, others to prosecute, to say nothing of a profitable chancery suit or two which he inherited from his predecessor, and looked upon as annuities to be transmitted most probably to his successor. What matter if the claimants starved, so that the legal harpies thrived?

"What news?" demanded Ellen, who had been anxiously watching the window, which commanded the avenue leading to the house, for several hours previous to his return, for her heart felt lonely and depressed. "Where is Gerald? shall I not see my husband?"

"In the morning, child," replied the old man with his assumed kindness. "Moreton's condition is much worse, and for the present it would be dangerous for Gerald to leave the secure retreat which friendship has provided for him."

Despite the sinking of her heart at this intelligence, no doubt crossed her unsuspecting mind; she felt that she ought to be satisfied with the explanation, and endeavoured to appear so. She passed the weary hours in writing to Fitzgerald, in painting her distress at the adventure in which she supposed he had involved himself, and expressing her gratitude to Heaven for his preservation. The letter, when finished, was entrusted to the rascal Prim. We need not say that the husband never received it.

A lovely moonlight night closed in the day which first saw Ellen and her child in London. The pretended grandfather even carried his hypocrisy so far as to bless the unsuspecting victims of his treachery when they retired to rest—to again pollute the brow of the confiding girl with his unholy kiss; the foulest, perhaps, since the one with which Judas betrayed his Master.

As before stated, the mansion was an old-fashioned one, entirely secluded in its own grounds, and the chamber to which the execrable hag who acted as housekeeper led the mother and her infant partook of the character of the rest of the building. It was situated on the second floor, and opened with folding French windows upon the broad leads which ran between the Elizabethan gables, forming a sort of walk, protected with a species of balustrade at each end. In the centre of the leads was a large skylight, lighting the entrance-hall and wide staircase which ran round it. The apartment was plainly but handsomely furnished; a lofty bed, with faded velvet hangings, stood in the centre of the room, and a Venetian glass, in a gilt filagree frame, swung from the inlaid ebony pedestals of the dressing-table, which was further ornamented with japan patch boxes, scent bottles, and a china vase filled with the freshest flowers. To complete the *mise en scene*, a Prayer-book, bound in purple and gold, lay open on the table. The room was so like what one would have expected to find in the well regulated house of a private gentleman, that not a doubt crossed the mind of our heroine but that she and her boy were under the roof of Gerald's grandfather; and the distress which her husband's danger occasioned was mitigated by the kindness and supposed reconciliation with the dreaded Mr. Radcliff.

They slept—mother and child both slept in that den of infamy and shame. The rays of the pale moon which lit the chamber seemed to linger round the heavy canopied couch like guardian spirits watching their innocent charge. A door creaked presently upon its hinges, there was a pause, then it slowly opened, and the infamous Lord Moreton, in his *robe de chambre*,

> With Tarquin's ravishing strides towards his design,
> Moves like a ghost.

Reckless even as he was, he paused before he ventured to approach the couch; perhaps it was to draw breath, or to give fresh courage for the unmanly crime he meditated; certain it was not the whisper of his better angel which restrained him, for he had long turned a deaf ear to such admonition. Placing the taper, which he held in his hand, upon the dressing table, he advanced towards the bed, and noiselessly drew aside the curtain. Ellen was sleeping with her infant on her arm; its little hand had disarranged her night-dress, as it lay cushioned on its snowy pillow, which gently rose and fell with the exhalation of her fragrant breath. To every well-constituted or manly mind her very helplessness would have been a protection—the holiness of maternity have thrown a shield around the slumbering victim; but the heart of Moreton was insensible to the nobler emotions.

Inflamed by the sight of her beauties, he laid his sacrilegious hand upon the coverlid of the bed, when the sleeper, who had been oppressed by a forewarning dream, opened her soft blue eyes, and awoke. At first she thought that it was but the continuance of the nightmare which oppressed her; but the proceedings of the now excited Moreton soon disabused her. As he threw himself upon the couch on one side, with a loud scream the now fully awakened Ellen sprang from it on the other.

"Lord Moreton!" she exclaimed, scarcely yet believing the evidence of her senses.

"Ay, Moreton," said the peer, with a triumphant smile—"the despised, *the beaten* Moreton, who thus repays the insolence of his rival—the scorn of his mistress."

"Mistress!" repeated the terrified girl; "I am a wife."

"My vengeance will be sweeter."

"A mother," she added, trusting that word would be a protection.

"Of Fitzgerald's son," interrupted the ruffian. "Good! my triumph will dishonour both."

"Art thou a man?" she frantically demanded, "or hath thy heart one pulse, one thought that's human? What have I done, that thou shouldst change my woman's smile to the deep blush of shame, blight my young days e'en in their very spring, change day to night, poisoning the source of honour and of happiness? Be generous, and leave me."

"I will," said Moreton, "after my debt is paid. Thou shalt find me a remorseless creditor."

Doubly excited by her kneeling figure, her dishevelled beauties, and supplicating tears, the peer sprang towards her, and, despite her struggles, folded her in his loathsome arms. Her shrieks became terrific. Vainly the ruffian attempted to force her to the couch; despair had given her a supernatural strength, and, despite his efforts, she successfully resisted.

"You strive in vain," he whispered; "these frantic efforts but accelerate my triumph."

"God will give me strength," exclaimed the agonised girl; "even in this extremity His mercy will open me a way. Monster! no, never—never!"

For the third time he had succeeded in dragging her towards the bed, where, with a last effort, she tore herself from his blistering grasp, and, with an action quick as thought, dashed open the windows leading to the leads; in an instant she was upon them, the ravisher following on her steps. With the speed of the startled doe she rushed along the leads, in the centre of which the fatal sky-light we before described was situated; in her terror she neither saw nor thought of it.

"Stop!" frantically exclaimed the peer; "the sky-light! God——"

Crash, crash, went the glass and the slender iron frame. Then there was a shriek—a wild, despairing shriek—startling the ears of night, as it rose to heaven, borne on the accusing angel's wings to be registered against the guilty Moreton. A dull heavy sound followed it, as the body of the desperate girl fell from the lofty roof upon the marble pavement of the entrance hall beneath.

All was over. Earth possessed one loving heart the less, one monster in human shape the more.

Moreton was terrified at the consequences of his rash violence. The fate of the late blooming Ellen appalled him; and he rushed from the roof to the hall below, in the faint hope that the life of his victim was not yet extinct.

On hearing the fall of the body, Prim, who had been caronsing with his employer in the library below, waiting till the betrayed and unsuspecting creature slept, started from his seat. He felt instinctively that something dreadful had occurred;—the noise was no ordinary one; there was death in its leaden sound. Cautiously opening the door, he ventured into the hall. The two wretched guardians of the den of infamy were there before him, their aged cheeks blanched with terror. The lawyer saw in an instant what had occurred; indeed, the broken glass from the skylight sufficiently explained it, only he thought it a wilful murder instead of an accidental death.

"What a frightful accident!" exclaimed the man servant, who was more collected than his companion.

"Say rather a murder," interrupted the woman, whose conscience on beholding the crushed and mangled body bitterly reproached her for the part she had undertaken.

"Ridiculous!" said Prim, coolly taking a pinch of snuff. "*How should a murder possibly occur here?* There is no one but his lordship above; and peers never commit murders; at least," he added, with a low chuckle to himself, *they are seldom or ever found out.*"

At this moment Lord Moreton, his hair bristling with terror, and his lately-flushed countenance pale as the features of the dead, rushed down the staircase. To have marked him as he entered the hall, one would have thought that the hissing snakes of the avenging fury's lash had been raised over him.

"Is she—is she dead?" he faltered.

"Quite dead, my lord," replied the lawyer.

"God!" said the young man, clasping his hands to his brow, "then I am a murderer!"

The two servants exchanged looks with each other; Prim observed them, and said:

"His lordship means morally, of course."

The observation recalled the peer somewhat to himself. With a stern voice he commanded the two domestics to retire till he should ring for them. They were too much in his power to refuse, and the careful lawyer followed them to their chambers, and locked them in. He was one of those who seldom gave a chance away.

"This is a fearful thing," observed Moreton to his adviser, as soon as they were seated in the library.

"An awkward thing, certainly," replied the man of law; "in fact, I may say," he added, with a peculiar emphasis, "*very awkward.*"

"It must be concealed."

Prim shook his head. Experience told him, as in the affair with Mrs. Mowbray, that it was more difficult, as well as dangerous, to manage the concealment of a crime, than to frustrate the investigation of it.

"What do you propose, then?" demanded his client.

"An inquest," replied the lawyer, "by all means an inquest. It is not unusual for persons to walk in their sleep, or for a servant to fall by accident in cleaning a window. By-the-bye, I think I observed yesterday that the skylight wanted cleaning." Then, as if more pleased with the idea, he added: "I am sure I did observe it—*could swear I did.*"

"Still I do not see the necessity of the inquest," observed the peer, whose coward nature trembled at the danger of exposure.

"Ah, my lord, you are young—very young; and although one of the hereditary intelligences of the country, have not watched the beautiful operation of the laws you assist to make as closely as I have done. An inquest, *successfully conducted*, presents a moral, if not a legal, bar to further investigation; and secures, in the event of any untoward accident, a host of witnesses, both in the coroner and jurymen, in your favour. Valuable witnesses," he added; "for few men have sufficient philosophy to see their proper judgment put upon trial without feeling an interest in its acquittal."

"Thou art an experienced villain, Prim," said Moreton, at length comprehending the idea.

"My professional services are chiefly amongst the aristocracy, my lord," replied the lawyer.

"You think this may be managed?"

"*I am sure it can.*"

"Be it so," said the young noble. "For myself, I shall retire to France; I have long spoken of my intention to travel, therefore my departure will excite no surprise amongst my friends."

His adviser warmly approved of his resolution. Absent clients, he knew by experience, paid well, and Moreton was extremely wealthy.

"And what," he demanded, "would your lordship wish to be done with the child?"

"Return it to its father," replied the half-repentant man.

"Dangerous, my lord—dangerous; might lead to disagreeable inquiries. For my own part, as a matter of prudence, I should decline to move in it."

"Let it be honourably provided for, then," pettishly exclaimed the harassed peer, who felt that he was being made a tool of by his agent. "I dare say you can find some one to receive it?"

This was the very thing Prim wished for, as he saw that it would give him a constant hold upon his client. In his opinion there was nothing like having two strings to his bow.

"I dare say I could," slowly replied the tempter, his thoughts naturally reverting to his old acquaintance Gipsy George and the orphan child of the murdered Mrs. Mowbray; "but it will be very expensive."

"Doubtless," observed his lordship.

"All that remains, then, is to summon the domestics and instruct them in the necessary tale," said Prim; "but can you trust them?"

"I can hang them," replied the peer.

"Good," said the man of business; "I am glad your lordship has been so provident, and taken such excellent security for their behaviour. I perceive that you *can trust them.*"

That very night Lord Moreton returned to town. As he lolled in his luxurious carriage his heart was ill at ease; the last fearful shriek of his victim still rang in his guilty ears, and an avenging shade pursued him; and he bore a portion of his punishment

like a coal of fire upon his brain—a serpent's fang within his breast.

At an early hour the following morning, the two domestics, overwhelmed with grief, made their appearance before the authorities, and declared that the housemaid, Mary Baxter, who had been but a few months in her situation, and whom they represented as their niece, and a confirmed somnambulist, had fallen through the skylight the preceding night and killed upon the spot. The grief of the pretended relatives was so naturally acted, and the house *so respectable*, that not the least suspicion was entertained of any thing like foul play. The farce of an inquest was gone through, and a verdict of "Accidental death" recorded; one of the jurymen merely remarking that the deceased housemaid had very delicate hands. A humble grave in the secluded churchyard of Charlton received the remains of the once happy Ellen, and ere the turf was green upon the little mound which covered her, the event in the quiet neighbourhood was forgotten.

That same day Prim paid a visit to the Rising Sun in St. George's Fields.

"Another babby!" growled Gipsy George, as soon as the lawyer explained the object of his visit; "I suppose it's a HARE."

"A what?" demanded his visitor.

"A *hare*. Had it been a poor man's child it might have starved before you would have offered fifty pounds a year to take care of it."

"Do you think I am without natural feelings?" said the lawyer.

"Natteral feelings?" repeated Sedler, at the same time thrusting his tongue impudently into his cheek. "All feelings are natteral. The viper, when it bit the old fool who brought it home to warm, as I once heard Black Mike the pedlar relate from the story book, was only natteral. The fox, when it grabs the goose, or the hawk the merry thrush, as I have often watched them do in the wood, are quite natteral The poor man when he robs the rich, and the rich man when he grinds the poor, are natteral. In short, my 'pinion is we are all natteral alike."

Prim smiled; he was naturally inclined to philosophic speculations, and the observation of his companion had given him food for one.

"You agree, then, to my proposition?" he observed.

"Well, I 'spose I must," replied the ruffian, "thof I don't know what the missus will say. It's rather a rum start to turn the old ken into a 'cademy, and the *dona* into a wet-nurse. Will you have many more scholars to send?"

"Not at present," replied his visitor; "but if I had, doubtless you could provide for them."

"Yes, yes—I'd teach 'em summut."

"*Doubtless.*"

"There's little Jemmy," continued the landlord, with a sort of professional pride, "can already draw a fogle—and he can't be more than rising five; he's precious 'cute."

"What!" exclaimed Prim, "are you bringing the child up to be a pickpocket?"

It was Mrs. Mowbray's child that Sedler had alluded to.

"What should I bring him up to?" demanded the ruffian, moodily; "*the world has taught me nuffin else.*"

"Very true," observed the lawyer; and the conversation dropped.

A few days afterwards, the respectable Mr. Prim paid a visit to the stockbroker, and commissioned him to buy in the three and a half per cents to the tune of four thousand pounds.

"What again?" exclaimed the agent; "the law must be a very profitable profession; it's not a year since I made a similar investment for you."

"It has its pickings," drily answered the lawyer, as he walked out of the office; "good morning."

"Pickings!" repeated the broker, looking after him with a glance of admiration, not unmixed with envy; "considering that the law has *no bowels*, it has *a wonderful appetite.* My boy Jack shall certainly be a lawyer."

With this resolve, the speaker finished inscribing the name of the respectable Mr. Prim, and placing the commission he had just received, in his memorandum-book, sallied forth to his usual morning business upon 'Change.

CHAPTER X.

'Tis one of the world's pageants to behold
Genius fettered to the leaden car
Of bloated fortune, crush'd by the yoke it draws.

EARLY on the morning which followed Fitzgerald's visit to the gouty peer, Richard Radcliff, who placed great reliance upon the penetration and discernment of his friend, wended his way to his house. As usual, he found Lord Bamff seated in an easy chair, his feet resting upon a sort of cradle, and before him a table spread with books and papers; for, like most invalids, he was fond of reading.

"Weel, Derwentwater!" he exclaimed, extending his withered hand; "a fine gate ye ganged yesterday, I'm thinking! It's no often I give a hatch of claret, and you to no come and taste it. I'm sair fashed wi' ye, mon—sair fashed!"

It was one of the speaker's peculiarities to use his northern dialect when conversing with any of his early friends, although he could at pleasure entirely divest himself of it.

"I am sure you will excuse me," replied his visitor. "I knew the friendly bluntness of your nature; and, although I have been Fitzgerald's tutor in the career he is doomed to follow, I could not endure to listen to your counsel. A specious web has, as it were, veiled the morals of the lessons I inculcated; although their effect has, I doubt not, been permanent."

"I mun alloo that ye ha'e done your part," drily observed the Scot. "He listened as patiently to my advice as though I had been a patriarch. It must have cost you years of training to bring the lad to such a mind. He snapped at every word I uttered as if it had been gospel. And yet, ye ken, it was no very saintly lesson I read the chield; indeed, I'm no sure I didn't go a *trifle* too far."

Although Richard Radcliff longed to hear as much, he felt annoyed at the actual confirmation of his wishes.

"It must be the portion of his accursed father's spirit which he inherits!" exclaimed the old man, bitterly; "my race never could have listened to such degrading counsel; although," he added, with a sigh, "for both our sakes 'tis better as it is."

"Weel, Derwentwater, are ye no of a maist unaccountable nature? Not that ye are much changed in that respect since we were boys together, for I weel remember ye were no of the same turn as the rest of us. Here have ye been toiling and framing a plan for years—and I mun alloo there's feasibility in it—to restore your name, and build up the roof of your fore-

fathers; and just as your labours begin to fructify, ye fall into all sorts of uncanny fancies. Hoot, man! Persevere boldly, or wake from your dreams at once!"

"No!" exclaimed his visitor firmly, recovering his usual self-possession by a strong effort. "If my heart drops gall and blood at every step, I will proceed. No voice of mine shall turn him from the path to which from his birth he has been devoted. This weakness is but the last effort of expiring pride. 'Tis past," he added; "it will return no more."

The old peer watched the expression of the speaker's countenance with mingled surprise and pain; he was singularly attached to him for one of his cool and cautious nature, for they had fought and bled together.

"After all, Derwentwater," he observed, "perhaps our own happiness should be our first consideration, and no the honours of our ancestors. You are rich. I've no to learn that. Undo the lessons ye have taught, and bide content wi' Fitzgerald as he is. There are other lands than Dilsel, and many a fair name to be won. The fields of Monkshold, your new possession," he added, "I am told are very beautiful."

"They are not the fields of my forefathers, not the inheritance which ages have rendered sacred in my eyes. Were they again mine, the wealth of India should not purchase them, nor a regal crown win from me the simple coronet of my race," said the old man, his eyes lighted with unusual fire, and his head raised proudly up.

"Weel, weel," said the Scot, in a sympathising tone, "all's not lost yet; at least there is the hope that if rashness and loyalty to the Stuarts lost a gallant name, a little worldly wisdom may win it back again. But, Derwentwater," continued the speaker—his lordship always punctiliously addressed him by the attainted title of his family—"that grandson of yours is a fine lad, wi' no slight touch of philosophy in his composition. He never winced under the devil's matins. I read him, mair than was just decent. Erringcourt will be no match for him I'm thinking, puir soft body."

"It's not his lack of talent that I fear," answered the old Jacobite, "but his want of perseverance. It is no trifling task to watch and succumb to the caprices of a being whose intellect we despise—to be obliged to turn and steer as his ever-changing fancy may suggest—to act the dependent slave, when birth and genius qualify us to take part in the affairs of nations. Can his young mind submit to such debasement? Mine would sink under it."

"It's weel, then, ye are no called upon to try it. But of that canny grandson of yours," continued his lordship, "I ha'e little fear. I marked his countenance—as demure as a minister of the cursed presbytery, where I once underwent a reproving, as they called it. The young fellow had taken even me in, experienced as I am, had not the occasional flashing of his eye told a very different tale. Indeed, you have fairly trained him to your purpose; he'll not stop far short of damnation to achieve it."

"You misconceive me," exclaimed Radcliff, his pride and conscience both stung at the plain speaking of the Scot. "The career marked out for my grandson admits of an honourable cause. Think you I would have him violate the laws of honour or of conscience? I thought you knew me better."

"Tut! tut! auld friend," responded Lord Bamff; "honour and conscience are very pretty springes to catch young birds with; and ye ken the world too weel to give the lad any *direct counsel* to violate them. Indeed, it wad no be prudent; for appearances (as Sir Simon Saunders said when he turned his coat for the fourth time in Parliament) mun be attended to. But *we* are no to learn that a clean page to the world, and a clean page in the sight of God, are verra different things."

"When must Fitzgerald make his bow to his new patron?" demanded his grandfather.

"The sooner the better," said Bamff. "Here's the letter of introduction; the time and manner of presenting it I leave entirely to himself. I am no sufficiently versed in the new-fangled etiquette of the day to advise him. Erringcourt will be in town very soon."

Radcliff took charge of the letter, which was most punctiliously sealed with his lordship's coronet and arms; and bidding adieu to his friend, retraced his steps towards home.

"After all," he thought, as he took his way through the park, "what is the value of the ambition which, like a dream, has haunted me—what its gratification? Will it bring happiness to Fitzgerald? No; for his feelings and his principles must pay the price at which success is purchased. Will it bring happiness to me? I shall not live to witness it. I feel the canker-worm is at my heart; my race will soon be ended. Pshaw! this is weakness," he continued. "Where is my boasted philosophy? where the resolution of long years of exile and of wrong? No," he added, quickening his pace and clenching his hand, "they shall not be dissolved into thin air, like the bubbles of a schoolboy, by regrets as vain as they are weak."

Fitzgerald, seriously alarmed at not having received an answer to his last three letters to Ellen, posted down to Cambridge, determined to ascertain the worst. The faithful servants related all that had passed; the arrival of the pretended grandfather, and the departure for London. Our hero was bewildered; again and again he made them repeat their story; he was astonished—lost in a chaos of conjecture and surprise. That his grandfather could not have been the mysterious visitor, he was well convinced; for he had, since he left Cambridge, been a constant resident under the same roof, and knew that he had not been absent for a single day. If, at times, a suspicion of Moreton crossed his brain, it was quickly dismissed; for he had read in the papers that his old antagonist had started on the continent for a two years' tour. It would be difficult to paint the agony, surprise doubt, and misery which the mysterious departure of Ellen created. They were the more severe, as the outraged husband had no one whom he could trust—no confiding heart to sympathise with his. After ten days of useless search and anxiety, on the repeated summons of his grandfather he returned to town.

The Earl and Countess of Erringcourt, with the Lady Penelope, were seated at the breakfast table. The former, who had been impatiently awaiting the arrival of his new secretary for several days, had just received a note from Lord Bamff to inform him that Mr. Fitzgerald had returned to town, and would wait on him during the day. Both the peer and the countess were striving by every means in their power to restore their maiden relative to good humour, who still resented by sulky looks and marked silence the dismissal of our hero's predecessor, her former lover.

"Penelope!" exclaimed his lordship, raising his eyes from the journal; "I think I have discovered a piece of intelligence which will amuse you. Lady Arden has eloped with Colonel Bulkley. I know you

never thought well of her, frivolous creature. What could induce the daughter of a duke to marry a Welsh knight? I detest all unequal marriages."

Lady Penelope remained silent, although her eyes spoke something like satisfaction. Sir Richard Arden had once captivated her fancy, and, although she had long ceased to regard him, she had never forgiven the rival who had supplanted her. The news almost restored her good humour, but she did not permit it to become perceptible.

"Apropos, Pen," continued her brother, anxious to convert his sister's half smile into perfect good temper, "the lord chamberlain asked me if you wished to attend the queen's ball? I shall be with his grace to-day, on affairs of state; what answer shall I return him?"

This was a mere *ruse*, but knowing that it would gratify his sister, he resolved for once to ask a favour, which he knew could not be very well refused, holding, as he did, at his disposal, no less than three votes in the Lower House.

"Why, yes, brother, I think I should like to go," replied her ladyship, completely relaxing into a smile; "I know of many who are anxious to be present, but who cannot obtain an invitation: besides," she added, "it would look as if one were quite out of the world not to be seen there."

"Why did you not name it before, my lord?" exclaimed the countess; "we shall have scarcely time to prepare our dresses—only ten days' notice. Pen, my love!"

"Yes, dear," affectedly lisped the maiden sister.

It must be observed that the speakers detested each other cordially, for they were frequently coming in contact in their game at cross purposes.

"I would recommend you that brocade we saw at Bottle's the other day—the pink flowers will just suit your complexion. I vow I must have one like it; it will be charming! We shall be quite the belles of the ball!"

This well-timed piece of flattery succeeded, for Lady Penelope at once agreed to the proposal.

The countess, seeing how well she had succeeded, thought it a fitting moment to introduce rather a disagreeable subject, which she did with her usual tact.

"When do you expect your new secretary, my lord?" she demanded.

"To-day," replied the peer. "Bamff informed me he would call this morning. I shall give him his instructions in the library. You will see the fellow at dinner."

"And what is the creature's name?"

"Fitzgerald."

"But who is he?" perseveringly continued her ladyship; for a new secretary was an event *to her*, as well as to her husband.

"A relation, I believe, of old Bamff's. It is through his recommendation that I receive him. Indeed, I could not well do less, since his lordship obliged me so handsomely in the affair of the vote for the Scotch peer. Some booby with red hair and a nasal twang, no doubt."

Here Lady Penelope left the room to dress.

"I don't know what to make of Pen," whispered the sister-in-law; "she takes the loss of her lover more easily than I anticipated. I trust there is no secret correspondence going on between them."

"Pshaw!" replied the peer, who, like most conceited men, had a very high opinion of his own judgment, and a very mean one of every other person's, especially his wife's. "Pen is like most of her sex; the newest whim puts the preceding one out of her head. This ball has closed the business. It would be confounded hard," he added, "after enduring her for so many years, to lose her fortune by some foolish match. It is well that we discovered the last affair in time, or we might have quartered our arms with a plebeian yoke, three horse-shoes, or some such infernal affair. Although I am of opinion that her connection with Howard is finished, it will be only prudent to keep a strict eye upon her movements; the old girl is as amorous as a turtle-dove."

"And as vain as she is old," added the countess. "Only last Ranelagh night she went as an Arcadian shepherdess! Some one asked her if she remembered driving her flock into the ark."

"Come, come," interrupted the peer, "Pen is not *so very old*." The point touched him, for he was only two years her junior. "But she is too far advanced in life to be permitted to play the fool if we can prevent it. What a pity it is," he added, "that we have no convents into which old women can enter, and rest securely from the follies which render age ridiculous!"

"Why not bring in a bill, my lord, to that effect? all the heads of families and those who have silly maiden aunts and sisters would support it."

"True," said the peer, with a laugh, "but the poor younger brothers in the Lower House would throw it out."

Here the speakers separated; the earl to his study, and the lady to her toilette.

Shortly after Fitzgerald called and made his bow to his new patron, who received him with pompous civility, although secretly annoyed at his handsome face and prepossessing figure,—fears for Penelope's fortune being again endangered passing through his mind, knowing, as he well did, her inflammable disposition. The last secretary was the seventh whose projects he had, with the assistance of the countess, circumvented.

"Ha!—umph!" muttered his lordship, as he let fall his glass from the Jacobite peer's letter of introduction; "my friend Bamff speaks highly of your attainments—says that you distinguished yourself at the university. All very well that; but clever men at college do not always distinguish themselves when brought into public life. I was not particularly distinguished there *myself*. Mechanical—too mechanical," added the speaker—"at least in most instances."

Had it been our hero's cue, he would have smiled at the assertion of his lordship that he had not particularly distinguished himself at the university, as well as at the look of conceited gravity with which it was uttered. As it was, he merely gave a look, which seemed to express his surprise that the Earl of Erringcourt should not have distinguished himself under every circumstance.

His lordship saw it, and proceeded in a more encouraging tone.

"The office to which I have appointed you is not merely one of considerable trust, but delicacy, being in the strictest sense of the word confidential; for without being in the administration—that is, ostensibly—you must be aware that I exercise at all times considerable influence; in short, that my opinions are looked up to in a certain quarter. What political writers have you been in the habit of reading?"

Fitzgerald enumerated Bacon, De Lorme, Burleigh, Bolingbroke, and others of the same celebrity.

"Yes, yes," interrupted his lordship. "I see that you must commence again. Bacon was a humdrum

phi'osopher, De Lorme wrote well enough for children, Barleigh had a few ideas worthy of attention, bnt Bolingbroke was a mere visionary, a speculator, a showy writer—nothing more. I never yet could bring myself," added the peer, with most serious gravity, "*to think like him.*"

Fitzgerald was secretly amnsed at the flippant vanity of the peer, so caustically described by his old friend, Lord Bamff. As it was impossible to reply to him without smiling, he remained silent.

This silence pleased the speaker, who gave way to his nsual love of affectation and display, little dreaming in what utter contempt the speaker held him, or how much he was amused by his vanity, ignorance, and egotism.

"And pray, Mr. Fitzgerald," demanded his lordship, with a patronising air, "what is your opinion of the present position of affairs between those rebellious wretches in America and the mother country? Give it me candidly and without reserve, that I may be enabled to judge of your political principles."

"I almost fear to give my humble opinion upon so weighty a matter before so profound a statesman," was our hero's cautious reply. "Of the rebels, I presume there can be bnt one opinion; but whether government has taken the most efficacious means of remedying the evil, I am not in a position to judge."

A professor of the Jesu at Rome, or any other college of Jesuits, might have been satisfied with the reply, since it answered the question without committing the opinion of the speaker.

"But what do you think of the steps already pursued?"

"That government cannot *now* retreat with honour."

"Retreat! No—no!" exclaimed the peer, with considerable warmth. "The traitors! to talk of eqnal rights—infamons! Where's the use of having colonies if we are not to tax them?"

"It's the history of the world, my lord."

"Of course it is; but can you suggest nothing said the would-be statesman.

"Nothing, unless to send out a viceroy, with u limited authority and conciliating views—a man dignity of character and sound judgment; such a m might do mnch for both conntries."

"*He might,*" exclaimed the peer, whose vani pointed himself out as the only person capable of su an undertaking. "I am delighted to find in so you a man such excellent principles and clear judgme I trnst that we shall agree very well together. C present arrangement must be the terms upon whi I am to avail myself of your services."

"The terms," said Fitzgerald, hastily, availi himself of the break in his lordship's sentence, a desirous of avoiding an offer which would have be grating to his feelings, "are easily understood, lord, between ns. The advantages of obtaining insight into the complexities of political science un so experienced a statesman are on my side; in retu for which I pledge myself to devote my hnmble tale to such efforts as may be most conducive to y views and wishes. Any pecuniary obligation, lord," he added, "is distinctly from the qnestion."

"Nothing," replied the earl, "can be more hono able and independent than our compact. At onc accept your proposition. As soon as convenient, will take np your abode with me; your apartme are qnite ready. If not engaged, you will dine w me to-day; a mere family party; my nephew Dig may join us—no one else."

"I am already acquainted with one member of your lordship's family."

"Eh?—what?" exclaimed the peer, concluding in his alarm that it must be Penelope.

"I had the good fortune to secure the friendship of Mr. Digby at Cambridge."

"Ah! I had forgot. Bamff told me you were of Trinity. A strange fellow, my nephew—not at all fit for the world. I never could comprehend him."

Our hero thought that it would have been strange if his lordship could.

"By the bye," exclaimed Lord Erringcourt, illuminated with a sudden idea, "have you ever written a pamphlet?"

"Never, my lord."

"Suppose you commence, then; nothing like an early trial of strength."

"Upon what subject shall I treat?"

"Let me see," said the peer. "Ah, yes, the advantages of an American viceroy, in the present crisis. Nothing can be more opportune. You need not be too explicit in pointing out the person whom you consider most fitted for the important post. The dedication will snfficiently direct the attention of the public; for every thing upon the subject of America is just now read by all parties with avidity. My bookseller," he added, "will publish it for you. I must now leave you to attend a committee of the house. Remember, we dine at six."

Rising as he spoke, the peer bowed to his new secretary in token of dismissal.

Fitzgerald felt a strange sickness at his heart as he left the mansion of his patron, and proceeded towards the unostentatious residence of his grandfather.

"So," he mnttered, "I am already plunged knee-deep in the tronbled waters of politics. Good Heavens! that I should degrade myself into a political scribbler, to pander to the absnrd vanity of the egotistical peer! "World—world!" he added, "how much longer wilt thon permit fools in tinsel and rogues in ermine to

hero—"say no more. I merely performed an act of jnstice. It was not for a friend to stand by and hear your intellect undervalued by one whose highest stretch of genins could not reach its lowest standard. Pray let us change the subject."

"Agreed," said Digby, shaking him cordially by the hand. "Now, then," he added, "be candid with me—what is your opinion of my uncle?"

"In what respect?" demanded our hero.

"Not as to his talent," replied the young man; "I know what *that must be;* but of his general character. Do yon consider him amiable, kind hearted, or frank; in short, a man capable either of generosity or friendship?"

"You have a right to my opinion," said Fitzgerald who knew by experience that his friend's penetration was not to be safely equivocated with, "and I will give it you as you desire, frankly. You mnst, however, bear in mind that my knowledge of your uncle is bnt of short date, and that my means of observation have been few."

"Accorded."

"From what I have seen of his lordship, I should

I was weak enough to believe that your words really meant what they expressed. I have discovered my error, and shall be careful how I intrude again."

"Stay, stay—ye maun no gang that gate," exclaimed the old peer, as Fitzgerald's hand was upon the door to depart. "The grandson of Derwentwater must not quit me in anger. I was not always this cross-tempered auld toad; but I canna help it—the world has made me rather bitter."

"Rather," thought his visitor.

"Did I no ken that youth has little sympathy wi' age, I might tell you what has changed me from the gay, frank-hearted man, to the sneering auld devil. But no, no; if I saw a smile upon your young lips I should hate you, and I dinna wish to do that, so let us talk of something else, lad. Weel, ye have seen Erringcourt; is he no a pompous ass? Ye will be sair beset to endure the creature."

"Patience is the virtue of dependence," said Fitzgerald; "and however bitter my fate, I must endure it. But pray let us change the subject, for I can but ill endure it at this moment," he added, in a look and tone which showed that he was ill at ease.

"Ah, lad, but that's no philosophic," said the old man; "yo mun meet a' your difficulties face to face. You are but young," he added, in a tone of sympathy and kindness, at the same time dropping his northern accent, "and have yet to learn that both heart and brain may be accustomed to anguish. Mortified pride, and sensitiveness crushed by the coldness of the world, or tortured into madness, need present to the heartless gazer no trace of mental suffering, but wear a smiling aspect. It has been done, and may be done again." And the old man, as if bowed by recollection, heaved a long-drawn sigh.

"It is a cheerless picture," said Fitzgerald, surprised at the new development of sentiment in the peer's character, "and one likely to put all my philosophy to the proof."

on their heads wha ha' driven a honourable house to na other means. Would I were a warlock, to see the end out; but I'm too auld for that, I'm thinking. Ah, well!"

"The gout, I've heard, is an excellent friend to longevity. For your sake, my lord, I trust the saying may prove a true one."

"Thank ye, lad—thank ye," exclaimed the old man kindly. "I could almaist imagine ye were sincere, especially as I can no leave ye any thing. The title dies wi' me, and the estate is in strict entail. By the bye, do ye ken my hopeful heir?—he is weel known about town. He does no often visit me; he thinks it's no worth while to pay court to an auld fellow wha *must leave him* his lands. I'll ask the thing to dine with me, and ye shall meet him. What say ye to Sunday next?—stay, no—the fortnight will be better; by that time this damned fit of the gout will have left me."

"I am perfectly disengaged," said our hero, "and accept your invitation."

"Now then," said the old man, "as the arrangement is perfectly understood, be off wi' ye. I've chatted o'ermuch for one day, and I've no wish to contract a habit of gossipping and a love of society; but it would only make my hours mair lonely when left to myself. Adieu!"

Lord Bamff held out his hand for the first time with an appearance of cordiality foreign to his usually cold apathetic disposition, and Fitzgerald shook it with a feeling of respect, if not positive attachment.

"He is not such a bad lad," muttered the peer as his guest departed, "and I dinna wonder that poor Derwentwater feels an occasional twinge of conscience, and I almost regret the petty advice I gave him. However," he continued, "there's one consolation; Erringcourt is baith a fool and a Philistine—fit quarry for any hawk that can strike the buzzard down."

With this philosophic reflection, his lordship recl aimed his former occupation of reading, from which the arrival of a visitor had for awhile disturbed him.

will be charming! We shall be quite the belles of the ball!"

This well-timed piece of flattery succeeded, for Lady Penelope at once agreed to the proposal.

The countess, seeing how well she had succeeded, thought it a fitting moment to introduce rather a disagreeable subject, which she did with her usual tact.

"When do you expect your new secretary, my lord?" she demanded.

"To-day," replied the peer. "Bamff informed me he would call this morning. I shall give him his instructions in the library. You will see the fellow at dinner."

"And what is the creature's name?"

"Fitzgerald."

"But who is he?" perseveringly continued her ladyship; for a new secretary was an event *to her*, as well as to her husband.

"A relation, I believe, of old Bamff's. It is through his recommendation that I receive him. Indeed, I could not well do less, since his lordship obliged me so handsomely in the affair of the vote for the Scotch peer. Some booby with red hair and a nasal twang, no doubt."

Here Lady Penelope left the room to dress.

"I don't know what to make of Pen," whispered the sister-in-law; "she takes the loss of her lover more easily than I anticipated. I trust there is no secret correspondence going on between them."

"Pshaw!" replied the peer, who, like most conceited men, had a very high opinion of his own judgment, and a very mean one of every other person's, espe-

CHAPTER XI.

Cold is the home of pride, though gilded state
Adorns the marble walls; the smiles we meet there
Spring not from the heart's deep rich content;—
Hypocrisy paints them—an incarnate lie,
Blistering the cheek of youth.—*Mariamne.*

PUNCTUALLY at the appointed hour, Fitzgerald arrived at the splendid mansion of his patron, and was immediately ushered into the drawing-room, where he was left to survey the gorgeous furniture, and contemplate the works of art which adorned the walls; even the surprising pictures by the most celebrated masters, statues, and antique bronzes. The family at last made their appearance. The earl's reception of his new secretary was stately, and intended to be dignified. By the ladies he was welcomed with the favour due to his elegant manners and striking person. To their secret annoyance, Digby was there. He feared his quick and observant judgment would detect that he was submitting to an unworthy part.

"You are not unacquainted with Mr. Fitzgerald, have you?" said the countess, as her nephew, anxious to consider his friend's reception agreeable to his feelings, presented him to her

"

"Not merely am I acquainted with him, aunt, but I have the happiness of calling him one of my intimate friends," replied Digby, with great animation.

"You may well say that," interrupted his lordship; "for we almost disagreed this morning in our opinions upon you. Mr. Fitzgerald thinks you a genius. I have not yet found it out."

Digby's expressive look conveyed, more than words could have done, his grateful feelings for this mark of Fitzgerald's friendship; but he made no answer to his uncle's remark; and as dinner was soon after announced, the subject dropped. The conversation at table was of a general nature, and nothing further occurred worthy of notice.

The ladies retired at an early hour to dress for an evening party; his lordship had to attend his duty at the house, where an important division was expected to take place; and the two friends were consequently left alone. Digby seized the occasion to express his gratitude to Fitzgerald for his supposed defence of him; which, after all, had been shown more by silence than by words.

"Say no more, my dear fellow," exclaimed our hero—"say no more. I merely performed an act of justice. It was not for a friend to stand by and hear your intellect undervalued by one whose highest stretch of genius could not reach its lowest standard. Pray let us change the subject."

"Agreed," said Digby, shaking him cordially by the hand. "Now, then," he added, "be candid with me—what is your opinion of my uncle?"

"In what respect?" demanded our hero.

"Not as to his talent," replied the young man; "I know what *that must be;* but of his general character. Do you consider him amiable, kind hearted, or frank; in short, a man capable either of generosity or friendship?"

"You have a right to my opinion," said Fitzgerald who knew by experience that his friend's penetration was not to be safely equivocated with, "and I will give it you as you desire, frankly. You must, however, bear in mind that my knowledge of your uncle is but of short date, and that my means of observation have been few."

"Accorded."

"From what I have seen of his lordship, I should

net deem him capable of any very great confidence or friendship. For the first, he has too much of the affectation of political caution; for the latter, he is too cold and calculating. At present, however, I have discovered nothing like positive evil in him."

"In other words," said the cynic, "you have found nothing in him worthy of being honoured or hated; he rises only to the level of your contempt. And yet you have condescended to accept an appointment which places your time and talents, the energies which God has bestowed upon you for far nobler purposes, at the disposal of such a contemptible being. And all for what?" he added; "to gratify a passion unworthy of your nature—ambition."

"Digby, I will be candid with you," answered Fitzgerald, secretly annoyed by his friend's adverting to the subject, "and with this explanation let the subject never again be introduced between us. I am desirous of using the energies with which Providence has blessed me, for the advancement of my fortunes and the restoration of my family honours, in the only arena where they can be made available. If by devoting my time and talents for a short period to your uncle I secure a friend ——"

"A what?" scornfully demanded Digby.

"A stepping-stone, then, if you will," continued the secretary. "Show me the dishonour. While my heart tells me that I have submitted to none, I shall not fear even your censure, much as I respect and value you."

"I should not fear," said Digby, "if the degradations to which I allude were merely mental; because the moment they were presented to your view you would, I think—nay, I am quite certain—spurn them with feelings of disgust and indignation. But such will not be the system adopted by your patron my politic uncle. You will be led step by step, still confiding, still hoping that each fresh shackle may prove the last; at each resolving to free yourself should another attempt be made: and so you will proceed till you are bound hand and foot—I had almost said heart and soul—a victim upon the altar of political subserviency. You feel, perhaps, that I have spoken warmly upon the subject of your prospects, but rely upon it, Fitzgerald," he added, in a tone of kindness, "I have spoken truly. Such men as you will be forced by circumstances to follow may be useful to the statesman, but they can never win the confidence of a nation; and the very position which you have selected for the realisation of your dream of ambition will in the end defeat it. Seek a nobler path—one for which your talents fit you; and quit the slippery track, which will neither bring honour to yourself nor good to your fellow creatures."

"And if it should realise your predictions," replied his friend, with something like bitterness, "I will turn cynic, and rail at the world;—disappointment always possesses that last resource. When, however, you find me sinking into the crawling reptile you have so graphically described, then reproach me. I shall be grateful for it. But let us change the subject."

"But one word, and I have done."

"Pray speak it."

"I am, as you are aware, rich," resumed Digby; "if any pecuniary affairs have influenced your arrangement with Lord Erringcourt, confide in me—command me; better be under an obligation to a friend, than to a man whose political character you must despise."

Fitzgerald's cheek crimsoned at the offer, but he commanded his temper, for he felt that it was kindly intentioned. After a moment's pause, he answered:

"And is it possible that my friend Digby can judge so meanly of me as to imagine me capable of accepting money for my services? No," he continued; "I may be connected with his lordship politically, but I can never become the hireling of any man. I am as untrammelled by pecuniary obligations as yourself. My compact with your uncle is of a far different nature. Digby," he added, "you have wounded me by this most disgraceful supposition."

"Then I have only to offer my apologies and regret. Believe me that I had no other motive than the wish of proving my friendship and esteem."

A quiet shake of the hands followed, and the friends soon afterwards parted.

A few days saw our hero's pamphlet completed, and given to the public. Confined as he had been by the peculiar views of his patron, which he was obliged to advocate, still the novelty of his style and the force of his arguments excited considerable attention. It was twice quoted in the House during the strong debates which were nightly taking place on the subject of the unnatural war between the mother country and the colony, and even the party to whom it was most opposed acknowledged the talent of the writer and the soundness of many of his views. Still Fitzgerald was not happy; the mysterious disappearance of his wife and child weighed with a leaden pressure upon his heart and mind; and his sufferings were the more intense because he was compelled to brood over them in silence.

His pamphlet was at the height of its success when he next encountered Digby.

"You need not confess it," exclaimed his friend; "I could have sworn to the style, even if my uncle's sending it to me under cover had not revealed the secret. Well, the commencement is not unworthy of you; that is," he added, "where you have not been trammelled by the foolish views of your patron; for I presume he is the enlightened statesman pointed at as the fit and proper person to be sent out as pacificator. I will venture you will not find a single member of either house who is not in the secret of his views, or who does not laugh at them."

"You mistake," said our hero; "I have merely stated a principle, not pointed at such an individual. If his lordship assumes, or his friends choose to assign to him the qualities which I have described as necessary for such an office, the fault must be ascribed to his egotism and their blindness, not to my want of judgment."

"Jesuistically, if not logically argued," said Digby, smiling; "but I am in no humour to act the critic at this moment, especially as some of the sentiments in the pamphlet would redeem a hundred graver errors."

"Thank you for so much leniency to my first essay. We must discuss the subject some other time. I am on my way to visit my grandfather, whom I have not seen for some time. Adieu!"

"Adieu!"

Richard Radcliff was, as usual, seated in his study, where he passed the principal portion of his time. Poring over the pamphlet when Fitzgerald entered, his salutation was more than usually cold. Our hero saw at a glance that something had deeply offended him, and his thoughts at once reverted to Ellen and his marriage. His suspicions, although not immediately confirmed, were right; for Lord Moreton had caused the certificate, which had been found upon the

body of his victim, to be anonymously sent to Mr. Radcliff by his agent Pilm. Human vengeance is sometimes very short-sighted.

"You are come," said the old Jacobite, "to hear my opinion, doubtless, of your pamphlet, for I presume it is yours?"

Fitzgerald bowed assent.

"Well, considering how hastily it has been done, it is not amiss, although not quite what I expected from you. Probably Lord Erringcourt's views clashed with yours on points, which destroyed its harmony as a whole; still it is well—very well; but the expression of my approbation or disapprobation," he added bitterly, "can be of little consequence."

"What mean you, sir?"

"Is this a forgery, an idle jest, or a damning truth? have I to forgive a folly or curse a disobedience?"

He threw upon the table the certificate of Fitzgerald's marriage as he spoke. Our hero was surprised, but surprise did not tempt him to falsehood.

"A truth," he replied, calmly, folding the paper, and placing it in his pocket.

"You tell me so," said the old man, giving way to a furious burst of passion, which was the more terrible for having been for several days repressed—"you, the being whom I have trained to restore the roof-tree of my fathers—educated to contend with the weakness of humanity, by teaching you to scorn it—you to fall into a snare so palpable as this! Folly's own trap," he added, "baited by caprice."

"I loved, and was beloved," interrupted his grandson, in a deprecating tone.

"Loved!" repeated Radcliff, scornfully—"loved! Was this the fruit of my lesson—my toil and care? Love, and a baby girl! Was such a passion to turn you from the career to which from the hour of your birth you had been destined? Where was your reason, prudence, pride? Was it because a piece of clay was moulded in a form pleasing to your foolish fancy, that the purposes of long years of calculation were to be abandoned—abandoned, too, even with the goal in view? Idiot—idiot!"

"Curse me! reject me, if you will!" exclaimed his grandson; "but, oh! in pity to my sufferings, tell me where are my wife and child?"

"Child, too!" shrieked the old man; "I shall go mad! Fool—fool!"

"Who has deprived me of them?" continued Fitzgerald; "what villain has dared to cross my path? Remember, sir," he added, "we are in a land where the law protects the meanest of its subjects, and prince and peasant meet with equal justice."

"Dost threaten me?"

"I am a husband and a father, sir."

"Know, then," exclaimed the old man bitterly, for he was incensed at the threat, "that I neither know nor care where the wanton and her brat have taken themselves. The proof of your folly and degeneracy come in this letter."

He pointed to the envelope lying on the table near it. Our hero eagerly caught it up; the hand was unknown to him; it merely stated that the lady having abandoned her husband's protection, the certificate was forwarded to Mr. Radcliff, that he might know for the future how to estimate the obedience and affection of his grandson.

"My life upon her purity and faith," said the broken-hearted husband, convinced that, in the present instance, he had wronged his grandfather; "time will unfold the mystery; in my agony I am sufficiently punished. Oh, sir, be generous and forgive me!"

"Fools forgive," replied the incensed Jacobite with a sneer; "weak men forget: I shall do neither. A mere intrigue, indeed, I might have pardoned."

"Are these the principles of age?—smile on seduction? breathe a curse on marriage? Shame, sir! shame!"

"Boy!" exclaimed the old man, roused by the sneer, "dare you presume to judge me?—you for whom I have sacrificed so much—have watched, have toiled, and sinned? If the ties between us were not those of affection, they were not less binding. The reproaches of the world, my own conscience, I may endure; but not one word from you. Begone—darken these doors no more!"

"Sir!"

"I would be alone!" continued the speaker; "permit me to remind you," he added, with forced calmness, "that neither my age nor habits render this discussion suited to me. I make no comment on your base ingratitude to one who has sacrificed so much for you. I shall find a way to punish it. You may leave me."

Fitzgerald had too proud a spirit to brook a second command. Restraining himself by a violent effort, he bowed to his grandfather, and quitted the apartment. They never met again.

For some minutes Mr. Radcliff sat with his hand pointing to the door, just as his grandson left him; no murmur escaped his lips, no sign of animation appeared on his countenance; he was, to all appearance, a still and lifeless statue. At length, the uplifted arm was slowly dropped; his lips quivered; his face, which had been crimsoned with passion, became ashy pale, and his whole frame betokened how fearfully his heart was tortured by the disappointment of his long-cherished hopes, for he had looked forward to Fitzgerald's marriage with one whose wealth and rank would have aided him in his political career.

"So, it is over," said the old man, large drops of perspiration chasing each other down his forehead; "yes, it is passed, and I have now no hope. I have deserved this, but not from him—not from him. Married," he added, rising from his seat, and pacing the floor with a hurried step—"married to some nameless beggar, or worse—a worthless wanton. Thank Heaven, he does not bear my name; he can't disgrace that. It is well my fortune is at my own, disposal. I little thought that I should live to rejoice that all which remains of the revenues of my house can be alienated by the stroke of my pen."

Fitzgerald rushed from his grandfather's presence, his heart lacerated, his spirit broken. It was evident that some secret enemy was at work; that Ellen had been lured from her home under a specious mask; but whom to suspect, whom to charge with the villany, he could not guess. Lord Moreton was in France; Osmond had accompanied him; and his share in Darwin's exposure had been more that of a spectator than a principal. At times, a thought, a nameless fear of outrage and violence, would come over him; but with a strong effort he dismissed it from his mind, as a thing too terrible for reason to contemplate, or feeling to endure. Like a perturbed spirit, he wandered till he found himself on the bridge at Westminster, gazing with a vacant, dreamy air upon the river below. The moon—for by this time it was evening—was shining brightly, and the towers of the glorious old Abbey were visible in the distance.

Two men were closely watching our hero from one

of the recesses of the bridge: they were Gipsy George and one of his companions.

"Mike," whispered the former, with a broad grin upon his countenance, and pointing at the same time to our hero, as he stood absorbed in his reflections, "that gentry cove is moonstruck, I suppose."

"I vonder if his ticker goes?" quietly observed the other.

"It will soon be *gone*," was the reply, "if he stands much longer staring there like the *statee* without his hat at Charing Cross. My eyes, Mike," he added, "do you twig his fawny? What a sparkler! fifty couter, at least."

Gipsy George alluded to a large diamond ring—a family relic, the gift of his grandfather, which Fitzgerald invariably wore. The gem glittered in the moonlight as the wearer's ungloved hand rested on the parapet of the bridge.

The speakers exchanged glances of consultation and doubt with each other; the opportunity was tempting; there was no other passenger near, and the youthful appearance and abstracted air of the gentleman promised but slight resistance.

"What do you say, George?—he looks a green 'un—shall we, eh?"

"Why, no," reluctantly drawled out his companion. "I've retired from the *purfession*, and, damn it, no—no risks. Come on; the old woman will be waiting for us."

At this moment Gerald, conscious of the attention he had excited, but without the slightest suspicion of their motives, resumed his walk, directing his steps towards the park.

"Taken wing," growled Mike; "I wish Aaron Wolf had been with me."

"Why so."

"He has *not retired from the purfession*," replied the disappointed thief, with a sneer; "he has pluck—pluck to the back-bone."

"And I?" fiercely demanded the gipsy, stung by the implied doubt of his courage.

"Oh, you," said his companion, with a bitter laugh, "you are '*spectable* now—cull of a ken. I shouldn't be surprised if, one of these days," he added, "you don't go to Blether's Hall, get taken in tow by Holy Joe, and made a constable of. You wouldn't be the first retired cracksman or smasher vot had risen to preferment."

"Shouldn't I?" growled Sedler, working himself into a rage.

"No, yer wouldn't," continued the angry Mike.

"The cove is gone into the park. Follow me," said the gipsy; "you shall then see if I have lost my pluck, or forgot my old trade. Had any but an old pal like yourself, Mike, doubted my courage, I'd have given him a taste of my knife."

"All right, George," growled his companion, satisfied that he had stung him into compliance; "sling out, or we shall lose the pigeon; remember the bird is worth plucking."

Fitzgerald had not proceeded more than a third of his way across the park before he was suddenly arrested by a rough grasp upon his shoulder, and a demand, uttered in a gruff voice, of "Your money or your life!"

"Highwaymen!" exclaimed our hero.

"*Nuffin* of the sort. Gentlemen of the road."

"We vont to know the time," added Sedler, at the same time drawing our hero's watch from his fob.

"And has occasion," continued Mike, "to borrow *puss*, cos our banker's stopped."

The contents of Fitzgerald's pocket were conveyed at the same time to the speaker's.

"Ruffians!"

"Manners," said Sedler; "I took you for a gentry cove, but I see you are only a valet vot has stolen his master's ring. I'll restore it to him."

The attempt which the villain made to draw the jewel from Fitzgerald's finger roused him completely from his dreamy apathy. Suddenly exerting his great strength, he shook himself from the grasp of Mike, who held him, and struck him a blow with his clenched fist which sent him senseless on the ground. Gipsy George was astonished, but his blood was up, and the brutal passions of his nature roused. Like a famished wolf, he sprang upon our hero, and a brief, desperate struggle was the consequence.

Our hero's youthful frame was half crushed beneath the gigantic efforts of his adversary, and had he not been an excellent wrestler, he must have yielded to his superior strength. At length they fell, like serpents knotted in folds; their limbs were twined together, and their heaving chests swollen with their desperate efforts. Sedler, for once, had met his match; strong as he was, it is difficult to say how the contest would have ended, had not his quick ear, as he lay upon the ground, caught the sound of hurrying footsteps, and told him that his victim's cry for assistance had been heard.

"Take your hand off my throat!" he whispered ferociously.

Fitzgerald tightened his grasp.

The ruffian felt that not a moment was to be lost. Suddenly disengaging one of his hands from his antagonist, he thrust it into his pocket, drew forth his knife, and opened the blade with his teeth. Fitzgerald saw his danger, but his presence of mind did not desert him. By a sudden movement of his body he received the blow, directed at his heart, in the fleshy part of his arm—the knife penetrated to the bone. Before the gipsy could repeat the stroke, several persons came to the spot, and our hero was relieved from his dangerous position. Two of the park keepers secured the robber, whilst the rest disarmed him.

"Are you much hurt, sir?" demanded one of the men, as our hero coolly removed his cravat, and bound it round his arm to stanch the blood, which flowed freely.

"Not seriously. But there is another of the villains somewhere," observed Gerald; "I saw him fall."

"This is a hanging matter," observed one of the captors; "robbery and an attempt at murder. Look for him—forty pounds more!"

Sedler, despite his hardened courage, shuddered; he knew the sum the speaker named to be the price of blood.

Mike, who was just recovering from the tremendous blow which our hero had dealt him, was quickly secured, and the party adjourned to the neighbouring police-office, where it fortunately happened that the magistrate was sitting.

"Now, my man," he demanded, as soon as he had listened to the charge, "what is your name, and where do you reside?"

"I shall answer no questions," replied the gipsy, sullenly, "without the advice of my lawyer. I'm a respectable man and a householder."

"Doubtless," drily observed his worship, "very respectable. And your name?" he added, turning to Mike. "But perhaps you share in the objection of your respectable friend?"

"I should think I does," replied the fellow, with a

knowing wink; "not so green as to be trapped by a beak."

"Old offenders," said the magistrate, "old offenders. Do any of the officers know them?"

The Rising Sun and its bullying landlord were too well known to the police, who frequently sought their victims there, to render it necessary to ask the question twice. Sedler and his companion were both recognised.

The watch and purse having been found upon their persons, added to the evidence of the park-keepers, rendered a remand unnecessary. They were fully committed.

"I can put in bail, good bail," exclaimed Sedler, beginning to feel very uneasy about the throat.

"You must know, with your experience," blandly observed the magistrate, "that bail is never taken for a capital offence."

"A capital offence!" repeated the robber. "It ain't no capital offence."

"What else would you call highway robbery and attempt at murder?"

The gipsy's flushed cheek grew suddenly pale; he would much rather the magistrate had rated him soundly than addressed him so softly; he knew what the law's politeness meant, and his heart sickened within him.

"I can put in bail for five hundred, nay, a thousand pounds. I'm a moneyed man."

"Doubtless. Gaoler, remove him till I make out his committal to Newgate."

"Two thousand!" gasped the wretch — "two thousand pounds bail."

"Not ten," replied the magistrate, in a stern tone; for he was tired of his importunities. "Remove him at once."

That night Sedler and Mike slept in a cell in Newgate.

Fitzgerald's wound did not prevent his keeping his appointment with Lord Bamff.

CHAPTER XII.

Life's but a game of passions and caprice.
The greedy heir watches the bed of death
With eager eyes and well dissembled grief;
The dying miser chuckles as he dies,
The expectant heir outwitted.

"So you ha' quarrelled wi' your grandfather!" exclaimed his lordship, as our hero entered his cosy little study on the Sunday. "Young blood—young blood! No respect is paid now-a-days to silver hairs and reverend experience. I'm thinking, as an old friend of Derwentwater's, I ought to hid ye welcome. But come, lad, sit ye down—sit ye down, and tell me all about it before my dutiful nephew comes. He'll no be long; for, like a vulture scenting a dying carcass, he is continually hovering round me, and I ha'e no the power to disappoint his avarice. Is it not a pity," he added, looking wistfully into Fitzgerald's face, "that all my estates are entailed, and the rents so small that I cannot save enough even to pension my old servants when I am gone? Pulr devils!—pnir devils!"

"I had no idea," replied his visitor, willing to divert his attention from the subject of his grandfather's quarrel with himself, "that the rents were so very small; and I thought, judging, I trust not impertinently, from your present retired style of living, that you would have been able to save a considerable sum."

"Why, I am no so extravagant just noo as I have been, lad," answered his lordship, with a scarcely perceptible smile; "and, to speak God's truth, the rents are good enough—just fourteen thousand a year; but I was young once," he added, with a sigh, "and what with mortgages, post-obits, and annuities, I am but the nominal master of them. You understand. But come, you'll no put me off in that fashion by leading me into idle conversation about myself. Are ye no an ungracious pupil, upon whom the lessons of experience ha'e been thrown away? Is this the fruit of my advice? Quarrel with your grandfather, puir man, as if he had no troubles enough already to vex him! And what is it all about, I should like to ken?"

"Surely, my lord," said Fitzgerald, "if my grandfather informed you so far, he did not withhold the rest."

"That is as much as to say, mind your own affairs," replied the peer, good-humouredly, dropping at the same time his northern accent. "Well, perhaps I am an old fool for troubling myself about other people's business. At best, the unsought friend has but a thankless office; but I have a right to ask. I have bled on the same field, and suffered, although not to so great an extent, in the same cause as your forefathers; not to speak of the tie of blood between us."

"I am married," exclaimed our hero; "I have exercised the right of manhood, the independence of nature, by choosing a wife without asking my grandfather's consent. No more. The man who——"

"Very fine, very excellent, no doubt, what you were going to say. Independence—manhood! But keep such phrases, my lad, till you get into Parliament; that's the place for such displays. Give me facts; if I am really to judge, give me facts."

Fitzgerald related at full his meeting with Ellen, and the history of his courtship and marriage, and the unaccountable disappearance of Ellen and her child.

"Well, well, I begin to see the affair in its true light," muttered the Scot, as our hero finished, "and must admit that you have acted very indiscreetly in the affair; but as the girl has gone off, the brother dead, and the certificate in your own hands, there's no great harm done. It might have turned out worse. You have had the wench, and that is enough for you."

Although his visitor was not possessed of the most perfect code of ethics, still he shrank with disgust from the indirect counsel of the speaker. The leprosy of lust upon the lips of age shocked him, and he answered with all the sincerity of outraged virtue:

"My lord, the being whom you speak thus lightly of is my wife, the mother of my child, dear to me as my own honour, dearer than life. I cannot answer for my temper. Pray let us change the subject."

"One word, lad, and I have done. Do you intend to stick to your marriage?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Against your grandfather?"

"Against the world," impatiently replied our hero.

"He may disinherit you," observed his lordship.

"He shall not dishonour me," exclaimed Fitzgerald, petulantly, for he began to get tired of the subject.

"I've no doubt but you think me a curious meddling old fellow," said the peer, "but I have a right to interest myself in all that concerns you. Can I not be a peacemaker between Derwentwater and yourself? Though, to speak the truth, my old friend appeared in a towering passion at what he called your unnatural rebellion. Tell me, therefore, am I to consider myself,

in diplomatic phrase, as invested with full powers to act?"

"On my account certainly not," replied the young man. "My grandfather commanded me to quit his house—nothing but his especial request shall ever induce me to enter it again. It is true that I am indebted to him for education and protection. Of affection, I regret to say there has been but little between us. For this I feel grateful; but I will not be his slave."

"Hoot, hoot, lad! what is't ye say? We have no slaves in England. Think of my old friend's fortune; it is all personal, and at his own disposal."

The speaker fixed his small grey eyes with a peculiar expression upon his guest, as if he would read his very soul, as he alluded to the wealth of Mr. Radcliff.

"My lord," said Gerald, "I thank you for your proffered mediation, but must respectfully decline it. Did my grandfather possess the rich inheritance which was once the appanage of our house, it would not move me."

"Weel, weel," exclaimed the Scotch peer, relapsing into his northern dialect, "a willful man mun ha'e his ain way. I trust my friend Derwentwater will do nothing rashly, and that ye will na live to repent your fine notions of independence. At ony rate, lad, come when ye will, ye will always find a friend here, —that is, as far as advice and a dinner goes; for I think I ha'e already told ye that in worldly wealth I am a poir devil, thanks to false friends and early imprudencies. But say na mair, lad—say na mair, for yonder I see my hopeful, loving nephew crossing the square. He will be wiser than his uncle; he has already two thousand a year, and yet, prudent chield, will na indulge in the extravagance of a chair this rainy day. Does he no look mair like a tailor or a shoemaker?" added the old man, with a strong expression of disgust upon his countenance. "There's a pretty figure for the heir of the old barony of Bamff! Faugh!"

Fitzgerald looked through the window, and could not help acknowledging to himself that his host's description of his heir was just, for a more vulgar-looking personage he had seldom seen than the one who was plodding his way across the square, wrapped up in a loose coat, and carrying a large oil-skin umbrella.

"Since your lordship has so little love for your heir," he observed, "I wonder you have never married. You might then have had a son to succeed to the ancient honours of your house."

"True," replied the peer, "mine or my valet's: four-footed beasts are not the only ones which wear horns. Think you," he added bitterly, for he thought his guest was flattering him, "that any woman could be found to love such a grim old carl as I am?"

"I spoke not of the present," said our hero, who felt that it was impossible to pay his lordship any compliment upon his personal appearance, which, without being either ungentlemanly or vulgar, was most unprepossessing; "but when young, surely you were—"

"If possible, a greater fright than I am now," interrupted the peer drily. "Age has turned those bristles of mine, which were once as black as the raven's wing, white as the snow-wreath on the mountain top, and given a more Christian-like appearance to my physiognomy. Did your grandfather never tell you the name I bore in the camp of the prince?"

"Never."

"I'll tell it you," resumed the speaker; "Gordon of Borlston gave it me at the supper given at the old palace of Holyrood to celebrate our entrance into the capital: Porcupine-scare the-de'il. He pledged me by it in his parting cup; and the man, the thing for whom I had fought, shed my blood, risked my inheritance, laughed—laughed with his minions. It was Gordon's last pledge on earth," continued the old man with a bitter scowl; "the morning saw him stretched upon the sward—a corpse."

Fitzgerald shuddered, and gazed with something like a feeling of disgust upon his host.

"Could you, my lord," he said, after a short pause, "for an idle jest spoken over the wine cup, shed the blood of a fellow-creature, of a foolish young man who had fought perhaps beside you—send him full of hopes and the bright prospects of his love to an untimely grave?"

"Could I do it?" iterated the peer, his scowling brow giving evidence that, although so many years had elapsed, he had neither forgotten nor forgiven the insult—"*I did it.* Was not she present whom I loved, whom, by years of slavish adoration, I had accustomed to my presence, to regard me without aversion? Yes," he continued, "*she was there.* Did I not see the shudder of disgust which ran through her young frame? Did I not mark her smile as the rude fancy struck her imagination—the curl of her proud lip? From that moment Gordon was a doomed man—that smile was the signal of his death—nothing on earth could have saved him. As I could not make myself beloved in my younger days, I resolved to be feared. I practised and toiled at all feats of arms. You would scarcely think it," he added, extending his trembling arms as he spoke, "No man ever yet crossed weapons with me and lived to tell the result."

There was a silence in the room till the servant announced the speaker's nephew.

"Weel, sir," said Lord Bamff, after he had presented his heir to Fitzgerald as Mr. Duncan Grabblestain, "ye are in gude time; but why the devil, man, did ye no get a chair? Considering that the dinner costs ye nothing, ye might, for once, have made your appearance like a gentleman."

The person so unceremoniously addressed muttered something about the shortness of the distance he had to come, the healthiness of exercise, and the great convenience of an umbrella.

"Duncan," said the old man, "ye ken that I hate dissimulation. I never knew you object to a ride when any one else paid for it, or to walk before dinner for fear of not having an appetite; that is," he added, correcting himself, "when ye dined at home: dining out, I'll allow, may make a difference. Why the devil do ye not live like a gentleman? you can well afford it. You don't eat and drink enough, at your own expense, to keep body and soul together."

Mr. Grabblestain received this speech with the same profound indifference he had done the former; still he made no reply, for although he had been informed that the estates, plate, and pictures were strictly entailed, he thought it not impossible, from the retired habits of his uncle, that despite bonds, mortgages, and encumbrances, he might have saved a few thousand pounds, which, of course, would be at his own disposal. Calculating upon this, he invariably abstained from all reply to his lordship's sneers and remarks.

The person of Mr. Duncan Grabblestain was about five feet ten inches in height, and what is commonly denominated lathy; thickly marked by the small pox: deep red hair, showing its fiery hue through

powder which, according to the fashion of the day, he wore. His dress of uncut velvet was ill made, and too large; it gave to his figure an appearance of awkwardness and vulgarity. The expression of his countenance was even more unfavourable. Charity would have turned hopelessly away from it, her half-uttered appeal frozen on her tongue. Cunning and avarice were blended in his eyes; and his whole person and manners were such as compelled Fitzgerald, who had eyed him narrowly, to mentally acknowledge that Lord Bamff's dislike to his heir was not altogether to be wondered at, since he felt a sentiment of repugnance towards him too.

"Weel, sir," exclaimed his uncle, whose bilious temperament did not permit him long to remain silent, "are ye tongue-tied? Can ye no make your compliments to the honourable gentleman I have introduced you to?"

"I am sure I am very happy to make the acquaintance of Mr. Fitzgerald," replied the young man, with an attempt at a bow; "but perhaps you do not remember your advice the last time I dined with you."

"And what was that, Bruin?" demanded the peer.

"Much, uncle, and I would not willingly forget any of your lessons; you told me that paying compliments was a waste of breath."

"So it would seem," growled his lordship; "but here comes Saunders to say dinner is served. Give me your arm, Mr. Fitzgerald, and help an old fellow to the dining-room; I have done the same for your great-grandmother when I was your age."

The speaker was too much wedded to the pleasures of a good dinner to interrupt its progress even for the purpose of venting his spleen upon his uncouth heir, whose claims upon his dislike were considerably augmented by the apathetic manner with which he invariably received his sarcastic observations. Mr. Duncan Grabblestain, therefore, escaped with merely a sneer or two at his coarse manner of feeding and taking a ragout after the haunch.

Despite the dislike which the appearance and uncouth manners of the young man naturally inspired, Fitzgerald felt inclined to lessen his embarrassment by drawing him into conversation; but the well-meant effort was made in vain: as easily might he have obtained an answer from the bust of Diogenes which was placed over the side-board. A succession of nods, intended to pass for bows, were all the notice Mr. Grabblestain condescended to take; partly from diffidence, and partly from a mean feeling of jealousy; for, although secure of the long-wished-for inheritance, he liked not to see a stranger at his uncle's table, fearful lest any property which the old peer might have saved should slip through his fingers.

The dinner passed off without any thing occurring worthy of remark; but to Fitzgerald it was tedious enough. No sooner, however, was the dessert placed upon the table, and the servants withdrawn, than the caustic spirit of their host revived.

"Nephew," he exclaimed, gazing on the unfortunate Duncan, who was philosophically cracking his filberts, "I have seen that coat before."

"Very probably," quietly answered his heir.

"But it was with other buttons," continued his lordship, growing very red in the face; "ha! I remember it now,—your father wore it on the day which polluted the ancient blood of the Bamffs, by mixing it with the puddle of the Grabblestains. How often it had served a turn before, I am not warlock enough to tell."

"Nor I, uncle."

"Gad's blood, sir!" continued his lordship, his anger considerably increased at the coolness with which the young man listened to the accusation, "can you not afford a suit of clothes out of two thousand a year, but must rob your servants of their perquisites by wearing your father's cast-off clothes?"

"You mistake, my lord; only nineteen hundred," replied the imperturbable Mr. Duncan Grabblestain, unmoved by the detection of his meanness or his uncle's anger. "Besides, these are dangerous times, and it behoves every man to take care of himself. There has been quite enough of the family property lost already."

This allusion to the affair of '45, in which the estates of the peer had been severely mulcted for his adherence to the Stuarts, and, indeed, narrowly escaped confiscation, roused the old man's passion to an almost ungovernable height.

"Why, mongrel," he roared, clenching his fist, and the blood rushing impetuously through his veins, "darest thou censure the conduct which thou hast neither the courage to imitate nor the honour to understand? But why," he added, curbing his anger with a violent effort, although his lip still curled contemptuously, "why do I suffer myself to be angered by such a mean-spirited whelp as thou art? Doubtless the estates of my house would have been perfectly safe had they been in thy keeping. It is well the title goes not with them. I thank Heaven," he added, "the name of my ancestors expires with me."

Mr. Duncan Grabblestain made no reply to this fierce attack of his uncle, but, with the utmost nonchalance, went on cracking his nuts and sipping his wine. The perfectly unresisting, cringing manner in which he received the insults of his uncle disgusted Fitzgerald, who little imagined that the temper so placid under the bitter invective of his relative could, when his personal interests became concerned, become fierce and disputative. Of this, however, he was speedily convinced; for, willing to make a diversion in the nephew's favour, and tired of the sarcastic humour of his host, he sought to turn the conversation by commenting upon one of the pictures near him, the merits of which challenged observation.

"Why, aye," replied the old lord, "it is an Albano.—a dance of loves in the peculiar style of excellence of that esteemed master."

"I think," observed Fitzgerald, who really admired it, "it is better suited to your lordship's cabinet than the dining-room; it is doubtless a gem of value."

"The thing is no bad, since I have twice refused five hundred guineas for it. It was bought by my great-grandfather, when ambassador from Charles II., at Florence. I have often told you," continued the peer, "that I am too poor to leave legacies; but I see no reason why I should not make the grandson of an old friend a present so congenial to his taste. Take the picture, lad, in remembrance of an old fellow who has nothing else to give."

Ere Fitzgerald could gratefully decline the offer Mr. Duncan Grabblestain was upon his feet, his saffron-coloured visage crimsoned with excitement and anger.

"What's the matter with the fellow?" demanded his uncle. "Have the nuts choked him? Wash them down, man, with a glass of claret. Don't stand staring there. What is the matter?"

"I am thinking, my lord," exclaimed Duncan, "that you have no right to part with that picture."

"Hoot, man, hoot! no right!" said Lord Bamff.

"No right, my lord," continued his nephew, striking his knuckles npon the table; "they are all entailed; I've heard yon say so a thousand times; and if it be worth five hundred guineas, it is too much for me to lose, or you to give to a stranger. I shall not suffer it to be removed. I shall look after my rights."

Our hero begged that he might not be the occasion of any unpleasantness between such near relatives, at the same time respectfully declining the gift of his host, assuring him that he required no token to remember the kind feeling he had evinced towards him. Lord Bamff was calm—Fitzgerald thought unnaturally calm, considering the very offensive manner in which Mr. Grabblestain had thought fit to assert what he considered his right as to the reversion of his uncle's property.

"Surely, nephew," he said, "you would not object to my parting with the picture to the son of an old friend?"

"I am the son of yonr sister," replied Duncan, doggedly; "and setting aside the entail, I think I have the best right to it; especially," he added, "as I valne the picture."

"Value!" repeated his nncle; "why, you know in your heart yon care nothing about such things beyond their sordid price. Surely the family portraits might content you."

"Because I *must* have the one, I see no reason why I should lose the other," replied Mr. Grabblestain.

"One word," said the old man.

"One word for all, my lord," coarsely interrnpted his heir. "I will not waive my right on the point; and if this gentleman accepts your gifts, he may rely npon my exacting an account of them as soon as the law authorises my doing so. Besides," he added, "I cannot say that in my opinion your lordship is entitled to any great delicacy at my hands. Considering the nearness of our relative positions, and your advanced age, you have always been extremely jealous of an inspection into the condition of the estates. I do not know even for certain the provisions of the entail; and yon have felled some of the finest timber; besides, the leases you have granted lately are likely to prove any thing bnt advantageous to your successor."

"Weel, Duncan," said his nncle, with wonderful placidity, "if you find that I have exceeded my power, you can cancel them, you know, although that would hardly be fair towards the poor devils who have paid weighty considerations for the same; but that is yonr affair, not mine. So, Fitzgerald, lad, the pictnre mun e'en gang to my nephew here, whose sndden love for the fine arts is a perfect mystery to me. I regret it, lad."

"Not on my account, my lord," replied onr hero, shaking him warmly by the hand. "I need no gift to remember your kind feeling towards me."

"Never fear bnt *I will find you a remembrance* of the old man," said the peer, "and one that my nephew cannot dispnte. I'll no forget you."

Mr. Grabblestain, seeing no further attempt on the part of his nncle to part with the Albano, which, since he had heard its value, had become extremely interesting in his eyes, resumed his former tone of subserviency. But the spirits of the uncle were damped; either his pride had received a shock from the unconrteous conduct of his heir, which he conld not conquer, or he was meditating some important affair. After a reverie of some minntes he broke silence:

"Oh, the infirmities of age! Time was I could have stood my bout with the best of ye. But I am getting old, and the spirits of yonth are too quick for the wearied facnlties of an aged man to keep pace with. Duncan and yon, Fitzgerald, mun e'en leave me. Yon see," he added, with a faint smile, "if I am no a conrteous host, I am at least a frank one."

The two young men rose to depart—our hero first, for the rapacious heir was determined not to leave his companion behind, whom he began to look upon with no friendly eye.

"Harkye, nephew," resnmed Lord Bamff, "call on Lord Selkirk and Jndge Burton in the morning with my compliments, and say that I shall be happy to see them on Wednesday. I have a presentiment that my days are not long for this world, and I wonld like one bout with my old friends before I quit it—so don't forget."

The affectionate nephew promised to comply with his uncle's wishes: indeed, he had listened to them with pleasnre; for the deep potations and excess in which he well knew his relative would indulge might possibly bring on a fit of the gont, to which he had for so many years been a martyr, and give him a chance of grasping, sooner than he expected, his long-anticipated inheritance.

"That's weel," said his lordship, in reply to his assnrance that he would not neglect his message; "and now, bairns, good night, good night."

Fitzgerald cordially shook the old man by the hand, and left the room.

Mr. Duncan Grabblestain remained to see him fairly ontside the door before he attempted to stir.

"What are yon waiting for?" demanded his nncle sharply. "Is it for an invitation? Yon will not get one. Yon are too young to be of the party. But yon need not be alarmed," he added, with a sneer; "I shall not ask Mr. Fitzgerald to join ns."

The young man was satisfied with the assnrance, on which, from his knowledge of the speaker's character, he knew he could rely; and he followed our hero instantly.

Unfortunately, their road lay in the same direction and Fitzgerald, who had conceived great disgust for his companion's character, was obliged to endure his society.

"If I leave him," thonght he, "the fellow will imagine I am disappointed at the loss of the pictnre, and I am determined he shall not have that triumph."

They proceeded for some minutes in silence; Mr. Grabblestain evidently cogitating some important point in his mind. After three or four attempts at conversation, the subject of his thonghts at last embodied itself in words.

"What is your opinion of Lord Bamff's health?" he snddenly demanded; "do you not think that he is breaking very fast?"

"Not very," replied Gerald.

"A man ought to have the constitntion of a horse to stand the life he leads. Did you observe the quantity of Madeira he drank at dinner?—two good bottles at the very least; and it could not have cost a penny less than six guineas a dozen. It is really quite shocking to see an old man indnlging in such excess, and wasting his property in so scandalons a manner. Such libations must soon kill him, I should think?" he added, more in a tone of inquiry than observation.

"His lordship's constitntion must be pretty well seasoned, I suspect," replied Fitzgerald, determined to torment him; "he may rally."

"Do yon really think so?" demanded the expectant heir, with a look of disappointment; "I thonght that

he was looking very ill; indeed, that the hand of death was not far from him. The wine he drinks is enough to kill a stronger man than he is."

"You alarm yourself unnecessarily; long habit has enabled your uncle to bear what I suspect would make short work of most men."

"You may well say that; the old fool spends his rents upon the wine and flesh-pots of Egypt; and I am almost inclined to agree with you, for I have seen him look worse even than he does at the present time," he added, with a sigh, "and yet recover; there is no calculating upon such constitutions as his lordship's. Have you known him long, sir?"

"A few months only," answered Fitzgerald, who perfectly understood the drift of the question, "and during that time have to thank your relative for much personal kindness."

"Umph!" growled Grabblestain, his fears once more alarmed, and his curiosity excited; "my uncle is not apt to take these sort of fancies. Of course, you were properly introduced to him?"

"Of course," replied our hero, in a tone which showed that he considered the question as savouring of no little degree of impertinence.

"And might I, without presumption, inquire by whom?"

"You ought to be the best judge of the degree of freedom you can consistently take with Lord Bamff," drily observed his companion; "for myself, should any man presume to ask *me* such a question, I should consider it an insult, and knock him down."

Mr. Grabblestain took the hint as it was intended; the subject was not again touched upon.

"And now, sir, I must wish you good night," continued the speaker, finding that his companion evinced no intention of leaving him, but evidently designed to accompany him home, a curiosity he felt no disposition to gratify.

"Oh! the evening is fine, and I generally walk an hour before retiring to rest," replied the persevering gentleman, "and will e'en walk your way; one road is quite as good to me as another; I hate to be alone!"

"*And I prefer it!*" added our hero, in a tone which even Grabblestain did not think prudent to trifle with "good evening."

With a formal bow he released himself from his disagreeable companion, and directed his steps towards home.

"Well," muttered the Scot, as he gazed after Fitzgerald's receding figure, "that's a fellow one must be cautious with. He must be high in favour with the old fool. What, give him a picture worth five hundred pounds? A fine joke indeed! I am not such an idiot as to consent to that. Five hundred pounds!" he continued, dwelling complacently upon the sum; "I'll see him damned first! Can the old man be rich?" he muttered to himself, as he pushed his way through the muddy streets towards his cheap lodgings in the Strand. "Can he have saved any thing, or possess resources with which I am unacquainted? No, no—he lives too freely for that. Why, then, should I covet his favour, or fear his hatred, since estates, plate, pictures, all must be mine, whether he will or no? And that's the reason he hates me. I wish he would die," he continued; "his constitution must be nearly gone. He cannot live long, I am certain, despite the predictions of this insolent fellow, who is some needy fortune-hunter. But he will not get a stiver from my uncle—I will take care of that. Well—well. Patience—patience. I'll to Lord Selkirk and the judge in the morning, and press them to accept the old fool's invitation. They are hard drinkers and no flinchers; a little more excess will perhaps accomplish all. Who knows but I may be nearer my inheritance of the broad lands of Bamff than I imagine? The old vault may soon receive another tenant."

With this reflection, the impatient heir, already possessed of more wealth than he had the heart to enjoy, made his way to his lodgings in an obscure street; for he was too economical, or too wise, as he termed it, to indulge in the comforts of an hotel. Indeed, nothing but the wish of looking after his uncle, and being on the spot to watch for his long-anticipated wealth, reconciled him to the expense of a residence in the metropolis. That night he retired to rest with a lighter spirit than usual, for the realisation of the long-cherished hope of his uncle's death seemed near at hand.

Fitzgerald arrived at the mansion of his patron time enough to join the family at supper—a circumstance which did not displease him, for he felt sadly out of spirits and harassed by the tediousness of the day he had passed at Lord Bamff's, whose principles were as little congenial to his feelings as the manners of his nephew were vulgar and offensive.

"And so you have been dining with old Bamff!" exclaimed Lord Erringcourt, as soon as our hero was seated. "Upon my honour, I congratulate you upon your courage. I endured it once, when we wanted his vote for a representative peer. If his wines were as sour as his temper, he would be liable to the imputation of poisoning his friends—no constitution could survive them."

"His wines," replied the secretary, "are excellent. I confess I cannot as conscientiously recommend his temper. But he has had much to contend with in the world, no doubt."

"Perhaps," observed Lady Penelope, trying to look sentimental, "he may have been blighted in his young affections?"

"Blighted in his young affections!" repeated his lordship; "he never had any, Pen—such men never have any affections, either young or old. He is one of those in whose system gall supplies the place of blood; his feelings towards mankind are as bitter as though he had been suckled on wormwood. As for your sex, he positively hates it, and I believe would as soon admit the plague into his house as a woman. I once heard him rejoice that his mother died before he was old enough to have remembered her, lest he should have been guilty of the folly of loving her."

"The monster!" exclaimed the countess.

"You judge like the rest of the men, brother," replied Lady Penelope. "This bitterness in poor Lord Bamff may be but an affectation put on like a mask, to hide his heart. Come, Mr. Fitzgerald, you have seen much of the world, are a traveller and a scholar—what is your opinion? Is Lord Bamff a misanthrope, or does he only affect to be one?"

"I fear," replied our hero, "that the treachery of the world may have made that which at first was an assumed character his natural one."

"Then you consider that his lordship deserves the character which my brother has given him, and that his hatred of mankind is genuine, and not affected?" inquired Lady Pen, determined, if possible, to prolong the conversation with Fitzgerald, whose fine person had made an impression on her very malleable heart.

"No," replied the secretary, thus appealed to; "I do not think Lord Bamff's hatred of mankind so confirmed as to close every avenue to his feelings; indeed, I should be most ungrateful, did I not defend him against such an assertion, for I can disprove it in my own person. With no other recommendation than that of being the grandson of an old friend, I have been kindly received by him, and experienced much hospitality at his hands. Nor do I consider the least part of his kindness to have been that which procured me a position alike gratifying to my feelings and advantageous to my future prospects—the honour of being an inmate of the mansion of the Earl of Erringcourt."

His lordship's countenance brightened at the well turned compliment. Like most vain men, he was highly susceptible to flattery.

"You are indeed favoured in standing so well with the crabbed old Scot," he replied. "I wish he had a good fortune at his disposal, for your sake—you would stand a chance."

"Has he not a good fortune?" demanded Lady Erringcourt.

"Certainly not," replied his lordship.

"No fortune!" repeated the countess, in a pitying tone. "How does the wretched man contrive to exist? Shocking!"

"Oh, it is not so bad as that," said the peer, laughing; "the estates are large, but strictly entailed; and although the rent-roll is considerable, still there is little left for his lordship, after the interest of the debts are paid, charged upon the property by the gay life he led when a young man."

"His lordship's heir seems likely to retrieve the family prosperity," observed Fitzgerald; "at least as far as taking care of the family property goes."

"Who—Grabblestain?" said Lord Erringcourt; "oh, yes, he is a true Scot,—cautious, cunning, and avaricious—a fellow who never leaves a loop-hole even for the shadow of an advantage to escape. Would you believe it?" added the speaker; "I had not been more than five minutes in his company, on the occasion of the dinner I endured with his uncle when I wanted his vote, than he began to sound me on the possibility of securing the interest of ministers for the reversion of the title, which becomes extinct upon Bamff's death, and that, too, in the old man's presence!"

"How unfeeling!" observed Lady Penelope, with scorn.

"Very!" echoed the countess. "Uncle and nephew seem to be well matched. How could you dine with such people?"

"Convenience and feeling must sometimes give way to higher considerations," replied the peer, with an air of importance, which was intended more to impress his new secretary with an idea of his consequence than impose upon his lady, who knew, by long experience, what was the real value of her husband's political interest, the sale having been negotiated by herself. "Besides," he added, not willing to offend Gerald, of whose talents, since the success of his pamphlet, he entertained the highest opinion, "Lord Bamff is one of the oldest peers of Scotland. Had the affair of '45 succeeded, he was to have been made a duke for his services."

"How did he escape the consequences of the rebellion?" demanded our hero.

"Why, with characteristic foresight, he raised enormous sums of money upon the family estates, mortgaged them to their full value, and then made them over to trustees for the security of his creditors," replied his lordship.

"I should have thought he would have been unable to find persons to advance money under such circumstances," observed the countess.

"Nor would one person out of a thousand have accomplished it. But the wily Scot applied to the two greatest capitalists of the day, who, for a proper consideration, became the mortgagees. Being contractors also for the loan, the government could not with safety offend them, and the estates were consequently saved from the general confiscation."

"But his head? The Duke of Cumberland never showed much mercy where his avarice was disappointed. How did that escape, when so many fell?" demanded Fitzgerald.

"The Duke of Argyle stood his friend with the ministry; and Walpole, finding he could neither glut his vengeance nor fill his pockets, advised the king to grant the pardon it would have been useless to withhold. Bamff returned from France, and has lived like a hermit ever since."

Fitzgerald smiled at the foresight by which the cautious Scot had been enabled to preserve his lands from the general confiscation, and could not help wishing that his own ancestors had been equally fortunate. He could not restrain a sigh as the thought presented itself.

"You sigh," exclaimed Lady Penelope, in an affected tone. "Ah, Mr. Fitzgerald! I'll lay my life some thought more tender than that of Lord Bamff occupied your mind."

"Nonsense," said the countess, exchanging an uneasy glance with the earl; "what else should have occupied Mr. Fitzgerald's mind? What so likely to make a man sigh as the misfortunes of his friends—unless, indeed, his own?"

"Sister," replied Lady Penelope, "there are many things to make a man sigh; but when they become abstracted, they think only of one of two things."

"And what may they be?" demanded the peer, determined to see how far his sister's folly would lead her.

"The first is politics."

"Such was not my thought," said Fitzgerald.

"Then it must have been——"

"What?" impatiently demanded the countess, who began to be tired of the scene.

"Love!" exclaimed Lady Penelope. "Ah, you blush! Convicted—convicted! But it is cruel, perhaps, to rally you. You may love hopelessly," she added, in a sentimental tone.

"Perhaps unfortunately," said our hero, his thoughts reverting to Ellen.

"Come," said Lady Erringcourt, taking advantage of the embarrassing pause which ensued, and anxious to break off the conversation, "let us leave the gentlemen to their politics. Pen, it is past midnight I declare."

As the ladies withdrew, Lady Penelope cast a glance of tender encouragement upon our hero, which was lost on all but the earl and her sister-in-law; for Fitzgerald's thoughts were at that moment occupied by Ellen and the mystery which separated them.

"By the bye, I suppose you heard the news at Bamff's?" observed the peer as soon as the ladies had withdrawn.

"What news, my lord?"

"Lord John Vere expired suddenly this morning."

The nobleman in question, who had filled the office of Secretary of State for the Home Department, had for years been the speaker's most intimate friend; and yet he spoke of his death with as little feeling as if he had been a perfect stranger.

"And who succeeds him?" anxiously demanded our hero.

"Sir Walter Mowbray, doubtless," replied the peer; "could a member of the upper house have held the office, most probably the selection would have been different. You understand?"

Having thus insinuated the falsehood he had not the courage to assert, for the speaker was about the last person the cabinet would have selected under any circumstances to strengthen their position, Lord Erringcourt bade his secretary good night, and retired to his chamber, but not, as he anticipated, to rest. A curtain lecture he little anticipated awaited him. The subject was Fitzgerald's supposed designs upon the hand and fortune of her sister-in-law.

CHAPTER XIII.

As drowning wretches catch at straws for safety,
So guilt, when menaced, maketh hope of shadows,
Trusting deceit and falsehood.

"The beak has got his claws on me, and won't listen to reason, thof I told him I was a 'spectable man, and offered good bail. Mike is in with me. I want your advice, and shall wait three days before I send to Sir Walter—*you know who*. Curly Moses tells me that he is the best friend I would have in the present plant, and as we have all three been in the same dodge, I expect that you will both stand trumps; if not, I knows what I knows. Your friend in quod, George Sedler."

"Dear me, dear me!" exclaimed Lawyer Prim, as he read the above letter, the first which he took from a pile lying upon the table. He had just returned from the independent borough of Mousehole, where he had been to conduct the election of his client, Sir Walter Mowbray, who had been forced to submit to the farce of a re-election on accepting a seat in the cabinet. "This is extraordinary. James—James!"

The faithful clerk appeared at the door of the office.

"When did this letter come?"

"Three days since."

"Who brought it?"

"A fellow who called himself Curly Moses—he looked very like a gallows bird."

"I dare say—I dare say," replied his master. "This must be attended to instantly. James, if any one calls, say I shall not return to town till to-morrow. Get me a chair."

"Yes, sir."

Without waiting even to change his travelling dress, the anxious Mr. Prim started to Newgate, to have an interview with his equally anxious friend the landlord of the Rising Sun.

The worthy lawyer found his old acquaintance pacing up and down the felons' yard, much in the humour of a caged tiger or a trapped wolf. Bitterly did he curse his folly in having listened to the temptation which Mike's sneers and doubts of his courage had thrown out. Indeed, so violent had been his resentment towards his fellow prisoner, that for two days it had been found necessary to keep them apart. Latterly, however, he had become apparently reconciled to him, though still at times fierce bursts of invective would break out, which showed the gall still rankled in his heart. The non-arrival of Prim had still further increased his ill-humour, and in his alternate fits of despair and passion he vowed one moment to hang and the next to strangle him.

"Ah! Mr. Sedler!" exclaimed his visitor, extending his hand, "I am sorry to see you here."

"Doubtless," grinned the ruffian.

"I should have been here before, but I have been absent from town on business for a distinguished client—in fact, election business——"

"I know," interrupted the prisoner,—"Sir Walter Mowbray."

"Hush!"

"But I won't hush! You know, as well as I do, that if I'm a rogue, he is a greater, and that you are worse than either of us. So if I must swing, others shall swing with me. I'll make a clean breast of it; it shall all out."

"Pooh, pooh!" exclaimed the lawyer, nervously, "don't talk of swinging; it must be a very difficult case indeed that I can't get you through—the law has such delightful uncertainties, *and I am so experienced.* Instead of quarrelling, George, let us converse like men who are interested in each other's welfare. What are you here for?"

"Highway robbery," replied the gipsy, in a low tone.

"How could you be so imprudent?" whispered Prim, blandly; "a man of your substance, too! I really am ashamed of you; it was beneath your position in the world."

"Stupid enough," said Sedler; "I could gnaw my heart when I think of it. Still, bad as it is, it might have been worse. It might have been——"

"Murder," said the lawyer, interrupting him; "that is worse, I confess. Was the robbery accompanied with any violence?"

"A little," growled the ruffian.

"Ah! tell me, my dear friend, what do you call a little? Speak out, there need be no concealment *between us.*"

"I stuck my knife through his arm."

"Whew!" exclaimed the lawyer, as if he felt a sudden twinge—"that's ugly—very ugly!"

"Would it had been through his heart!" muttered the gipsy.

"That might have been better," observed the man of law to himself; but he was too prudent to give utterance to his thought.

"Who is the person with whom you had this little unpleasant affair?" he inquired. "His evidence must be bought off."

"Impossible!" said the prisoner; "he is one of your regular gentry coves. When the beak asked him for his address, he gave the house of some lord. Erring—Herrey—Herring—something."

"Erringcourt?" suggested Prim.

"That's the name."

"Was it his lordship, then, whom you so imprudently——"

"No," interrupted Sedler—for since his imprisonment he had become most nervously impatient—"the fellow called himself Fitzgerald."

"What did you say?" demanded the lawyer, breathless with astonishment.

"Fitzgerald."

"Well, that is remarkable."

"Do you know him?" eagerly demanded the prisoner.

"No."

"That's a lie—you do know him!" exclaimed the gipsy, ferociously. "Come, come—no ringing the doubles on me. Deal on the square, or it shall all out."

"Well, it is a lie," said the man of law, "for I do know him."

"I thought so."

"But he does not know me; and if he did," continued the speaker, "it would only make him the more inveterate against us both. One thing you are sure of—that, if it can be done, I'll save you for my own sake. Do not you question me as to the means. As for your companion Mike, I can do nothing for him—absolutely nothing."

"Yes you can," whispered Sedler; "hang him—hang him! He stung me by sneering at my courage. I should chuckle to see him at the gallows' foot, even if I rode in the same cart with him."

"You must have confidence in me," observed Prim.

"I can't," replied the fellow, wildly—"I can't. I see the devil peeping through your eyes, mocking your promises. I am sure you will deceive me; and yet, like a wretch, I cling to you as madmen cling to hope. I know the rope is straw, yet still I hold by it."

"And if you are wise you will hold tightly" added Prim; "for 'tis your last stay."

"No it aint," said the prisoner doggedly; "I've one more left."

"And what is that?"

"Sir Walter Mowbray," replied the fellow, sullenly.

"Sir Walter Mowbray! pooh!" said the lawyer, trying to look as unembarrassed as possible; "how can he serve you?"

"Hasn't the king made him first *scratchetary?*"

"First what?" demanded the really puzzled lawyer.

"Scratchetary; Curly Moses told me so;—the fellow wot settles who's to be hanged and who isn't; the sorter of gaol-birds for the gallows."

"Nothing of the kind."

"There you are," resumed the prisoner, "lying again. The governor told me so, as well as Curly Moses, and I axed Holy Joe besides. Do you think they'd all three lie?"

The allusion to the chaplain startled his visitor, who dreaded his accomplice falling into his hands. It is astonishing how soon he became enlightened as to the gipsy's meaning.

"Oh! I see; you mean secretary—secretary of state?"

"Well, s'pose I does! it's all the same, secretary or scratchetary."

"You are right—quite right. Sir Walter does fill that important office, and it is upon that I build my hopes."

"So do I."

"I will see him, and talk over yonr case, which is really a very interesting one."

"We must talk it over *together*," said the prisoner; "ay, yon may stare, but I know my man. When the day of trial comes, unless I have assurance from his own lips that my life will be spared, out comes all."

"Surely you don't mean——"

"Don't I?" said the ruffian. "The *'stifeate* of his son's marriage—the murder of his daughter-in-law! Damn me," he added, "if my missus shan't pitch his grandson into his lap in open court. You know me—I'm a man of my word."

"My dear Sedler," exclaimed the really alarmed Prim, "what good could such a proceeding do?"

"Prevent my hanging alone. If I must ride the colt that's foaled of an scorn, I'll have a companion on the crupper. Ha! ha! ha!—a gipsy and a lawyer!—the devil would chuckle to see us arrive together."

His visitor began to feel a peculiar uneasiness abont his throat, and, for the first time perhaps for many years of his life, he wished that he had kept within the pale, of that which the world calls honesty, he might still have found scope for his genius.

"I will see the baronet this very day," he nervonsly mnttered; "don't be alarmed, George—don't be alarmed; he must save us—you, I mean. Really I feel so interested that I shall not be able to rest till I have seen him."

It was finally agreed that Prim should wait npon Sir Walter Mowbray and consult with him what best could be done to save so useful a person as the respectable landlord of the Rising Sun, who followed his visitor to the gate of the felons' yard, and whispered him, as he took leave:

"Tell the governor it will all out unless he does the handsome. I'd do any thing to oblige him in reason; but I cant—I won't hang alone."

"You shan't," replied Prim, shaking him cordially by the hand, "*rely upon it you shan't.*"

"I won't," repeated the fellow, eyeing him with a ferocious air. "Revenge is sweeter than any thing bnt safety—remember that."

"*I shall remember it.* Keep quiet. There—good bye!"

"Good bye!" growled the gipsy, and the pair of worthies separated.

"Dear me," muttered the lawyer, as he directed his steps to the baronet's, this time to his official residence in Downing Street, "an unpleasant affair, very unpleasant affair! I begin to wish I were well ont of it. Sir Walter will be furious. No matter, let him. We are embarked in the same boat, and must sink or swim together. What a singular incident!" he added, still talking to himself,—"Fitzgerald and Sedler! It was a thousand chances they ever came together. Fools would call it Providence—retribution—the hand of Heaven! Pooh! if Heaven had a hand in every crime which is bronght to light, by this time it must be a very dirty one!"

On his arrival in Downing Street he found the baronet ready dressed for a levee. He was in excellent humour at his re-election, and the lawyer, who had managed the affair, was graciously received.

"Upon my word, Mr. Prim," exclaimed the minister, with a smile, "yon are an importunate creditor! But twelve hours elected, and you bring me yonr account already!"

"I don't come with my account, Sir Walter."

"What then? Has Mr. Oldtree"—the name of the speaker's late opponent—"demanded an investigation? I hope you have kept my name," he added, "clear in the affair."

"Of course, Sir Walter—quite clear."

"What then?"

"The fact is," resumed the lawyer, "a friend of mine—indeed, I may say a friend of both of us—has lately compromised himself in a very awkward manner."

"In the election?"

"No, Sir Walter, in a highway robbery."

The great man stared. The idea of any person to whom he could possibly be known being compromised in such an affair, at the first blush seemed so ridiculous that he could have laughed, had he been on sufficient terms of familiarity to take such a liberty with himself; as it was, he merely elevated his eyebrows in a manner which seemed to say:

"Are yon mad, or drunk? Explain yourself."

Prim understood him.

"It is a fellow named Sedler, whom I was obliged to employ in a certain affair five years since, in which the honour of your family, Sir Walter, is deeply interested."

"What then?" exclaimed the baronet; "I suppose you paid him?"

"Of ceurse I paid him," faltered the lawyer, really at a loss how to break the intelligence; "bnt since then, poor fellow! he has been unfortunate and robbed."

"On the highway?" demanded the speaker's client.

"On the highway, Sir Walter."

"With violence?"

"With violence. An excellent creature, bnt so impetuous."

"He must hang, excellent as he is. You have not been concerned in the law so many years, Mr. Prim, without having observed that his most gracious majesty has an aversion, in fact a peculiar antipathy, to highwaymen, which, coupled with his *propensity for hanging*—that is, his exalted sense of justice—renders the condition of your friend, if convicted, hopeless. Of course," he added, fixing a keen glance upon the lawyer as he spoke, "you have not been fool or knave enongh to compromise my name in the affair?"

"Certainly not; but——"

"But what?" impatiently demanded the minister. "Speak ont; let me know at once with what and with whom I have to deal. I hate half-confidences as I do half villains."

"Your name," said Prim, finding it useless further to mince the matter, "has been compromised, bnt through no fault of mine. The man I speak of was the one employed to steal the child."

"Go on!" exclaimed Sir Walter, turning very pale.

"It seems, in the struggle with its mother, he possessed himself of certain papers; amongst others, the marriage certificate, which he has promised to produce in court, confessing every thing, unless he has an assurance from your own lips that his life will be spared."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the old man, deeply agitated. "The king, were I to solicit it upon my knees, would never grant such a request. There are points," he added, "upon which his most gracious majesty is as obstinate as a mule. Ruin—disgrace—disgrace!"

Mr. Prim began to feel very uneasy. Though the baronet might be disgraced by the threatened disclosures of Gipsy George, his life at least was safe. Not so with the lawyer's. There had been transactions

between Sedler and himself which he well knew might send him to the gallows. He remained for some moments plunged in reflection: a faint smile at last illuminated his sallow countenance.

"You could promise him, Sir Walter," he observed.

"Of what use," demanded the minister, "would that be if I lacked the power to keep my word?"

"Leave that to me," said the lawyer, with a chuckle. "And now I think of it, I should prefer hanging the fellow; it would be pleasanter — much pleasanter. Only suffer yourself to be guided by my advice, and we shall outwit the rascal yet."

"You have deceived me once," said the baronet; "how can I trust you?"

"My reputation depends upon the success of my plan."

"Your reputation!—pshaw!"

"Well, then, my life," added the lawyer.

"Your life," repeated the minister; "that is a pledge I think I may trust to."

The next day the new Secretary of State for the Home Department, attended by the sheriffs and governor of Newgate, inspected the prison. Sedler, who had been informed of the intended visit by Prim, kept his cell under the plea of indisposition. The arrival of the great man produced quite a sensation. The chaplain was all smiles and information in hopes of a living; the sheriffs, as they listened to his commendations, dreamt of knighthood; and the governor already saw his eldest son appointed to a clerkship in the Treasury on Sir Walter merely observing that he was a fine boy.

"Have we seen all the prisoners?" demanded the baronet of the smirking officials.

"All," said the governor, "except one—a rascally highwayman."

"And is he the only prisoner whom I have not seen?"

"The only one."

"Show me to his cell; my tour of inspection must be complete."

Sedler, who had been well instructed by Prim, was fully prepared to receive his visitor. The attendance of the sheriffs and governor sufficiently proved his importance; but he possessed a better guarantee in his personal knowledge of Sir Walter, whom he had frequently watched from his mansion in order to make himself acquainted with his person; for the gipsy was a man of precaution.

"So," he murmured to himself, "the devil's shark has not deceived me."

For a few moments the great villain and the poor one remained gazing on each other; there was a species of fascination in their look. The minister was the first to speak:

"He seems a hardened knave."

"There are greater knaves than I am in the world, Sir Walter Mowbray," coolly observed the prisoner.

"You know me!" exclaimed the baronet with well-assumed surprise.

"I should think I does."

"And what do you know of me?"

"Oh, *nuffin, nuffin*, only that some friends of mine were extremely anxious to have the pleasure of meeting you and one or two of your friends in your way to the *parliament-house*, where your gentry coves makes laws to catch the little flies, and let the big uns break through."

"Insolent!" exclaimed the governor.

"Benighted ignorance of our blessed constitution," added the chaplain.

"Revolutionary," echoed the sheriffs.

"And who are these precious friends of yours?" demanded Sir Walter.

The prisoner laid his forefinger to his nose, as much as to say, "Don't you wish you may get it?"

"What *does* he mean?" exclaimed the great man, turning to the chaplain.

"Some sinful hieroglyphic or another," replied the clergyman, with difficulty repressing a smile at the question, which it would have been unbecoming of his cloth to have understood.

The sheriffs, of course, were equally puzzled.

The governor at last condescended to explain; but even he had his reserved points of gentility, and only *guessed* at the prisoner's meaning.

"Rum guffins!" muttered the gipsy to himself; "I can make nothing of them."

"I think the observation of the fellow, at the least, suspicious."

"Very!" echoed the attendants.

"My good fellow," resumed the baronet, in his blandest voice, "if you have any information concerning the welfare of the state, or the safety of its unworthy servants, you had better reveal it instantly."

"And what should I get by that?" demanded the prisoner.

"The approbation of your conscience," replied the chaplain.

"Do you patter to the crimp coves," said the gipsy, with a sneer, "merely for the approbation of your's? No, no; you and I, Holy Joe, know a trick worth two of that."

"Reprobate!" muttered the ecclesiastic. "Reprobate!"

"Such a disclosure," said the minister, "might serve you with the government; that is," he added, "if your information were really useful; not otherwise."

"No time like the present," exclaimed the ruffian; "so that if you will only send those eavesdroppers away——"

Sheriffs, chaplain, and governor alike protested against the absurdity of such a request. Was it likely that Sir Walter Mowbray, his majesty's secretary of state for the Home Department, would trust himself alone with a felon? Ridiculous! not to be thought of!

"So you will not speak out, unless to me alone?" he said.

"I'm blessed if I do!"

"Then," said the visitor, "I shall remain. The service of the state is paramount to every other consideration. Oblige me, gentlemen, by remaining outside the door of the cell."

"Oh! Sir Walter! consider——"

"I am not in the habit of changing my resolutions," said the baronet, coolly; "the ruffian is heavily ironed; there can be little personal risk; you can remain at the door."

"And don't listen," added the prisoner, "'specially the parson."

Finding the great man patriotically resolved to run the risk of remaining alone with Sedler, the rest of the visitors withdrew. The gipsy had acted his part with his usual cunning. At the time of his imprisonment the public mind was continually agitated by rumours of conspiracies and plots against both the sovereign and his ministers. The lawyer had well calculated the probabilities before he put him up to it.

"Now," said the minister, as soon as they were alone, "you would speak with me—be quick. What is it you require?"

"My life," whispered the prisoner.

"And at what price do yon propose to purchase it?"

"My silence," said the prisoner. "I have the *stificate* of your son's marriage, and can tell a queer tale of your daughter-in-law's death. Beside, that is not all. Your grandson——"

"My grandson!" repeated the baronet, tnrning pale; "what of him?"

"Is in my hands. I brought him up, and can produce him, like a bagged fox, to be turned ont when I require him. Is it a bargain?"

"It is."

"I am free, then?"

"Impossible," said the great man; "the king himself could not release you till *after your trial.*"

"After my trial," repeated the gipsy, slowly. "No—a word from you, and those yelping, fawning curs who watch at the door of my cell would leave it wide enongh. I can't stand my trial—I won't."

"You must," said the baronet.

"I won't," replied the prisoner.

"Do your utmost, then," said Sir Walter; "my rank and name will screen, if they do not justify, me in the eyes of the world. At the worst," he added, "it is but retiring from public life. Farewell. But remember, if once I pass from this cell, not all the world shall save you from the gibbet."

There was a pause; the speakers, though born in such unequal ranks of life, had hitherto treated almost on a footing of equality, and the proud baronet bitterly felt the degradation to which he had submitted. Had it been merely to preserve his life, he would have spurned it without a moment's hesitation; but his honour, his hitherto unsullied name, that at least was worth a struggle to preserve; to say nothing of his descent, contaminated, as he supposed, by the marriage of his heir with the daughter and sister of a poor country curate.

"Stay," faltered the prisoner; "if I stand my trial and keep dark, what proof have I—what security—that you will not bilk me at the last?"

"My word."

"I'll take it," sighed the gipsy; "I must take it. But mark me, he added, "if you break faith with me, at the foot of the gallows I'll proclaim your villany; my soul shall return from hell to haunt you; I will set on those to dog your steps shall leave you nor rest nor safety; I'll have your lying tongne torn from its roots, and nailed to the gate of Newgate."

"Be it so," said his visitor, with difficulty bending his haughty soul to the task he had undertaken; "we understand each other. Before your trial I am powerless; after it, a stroke of my pen can commute your punishment."

"Agreed."

"Agreed," repeated the baronet but remember, you must keep silence with those aronnd you."

On knocking at the door of the cell, the governor, sheriffs, and chaplain entered. Curiosity was marked npon the features of all, but respect kept them from asking an explanation.

"Mr. Governor," said the minister, "this man has given information which may prove of the ntmost importance to the government. You will show him every indulgence compatible with the regnlations of the prison and the security of his person."

The functionary bowed.

"Let Prim, the attorney, at all times have access to him—it will be necessary to employ him in this case. *I know him to be a respectable man—he has my confidence.* Mr. Sheriff, I shall be happy to present you at the next levee. Mr. Chaplain, I shall not forget your zeal. Persevere," he added, turning to the prisoner, "in the good resolutions you have framed, and it may be well for you."

As the officials conducted the visitor to his carriage he impressed upon all of them the necessity of silence respecting what had transpired, and left them charmed with his urbanity and condescension.

The next morning the leading ministerial paper contained the following article:—

"Visit of Sir Walter Mowbray to Newgate.—The new secretary of state, attended by the sheriffs, inspected the prison, and expressed himself highly satisfied to the authorities at the order, discipline, and cleanliness which prevail throughout that vast establishment. It is said to be the honourable baronet's intention to visit every prison in the metropolis. This is as it should be: we have long required an active head at the Home Department."

It would seem that humbug was as well understood in those days as at present.

CHAPTER XIV.

Who pulls the bow too taut, o'ershoots the mark,
Passing the bourn it aimed at.

The night after the conversation at snpper Lady Penelope's dreams were of Fitzgerald. At first sight his elegant person had made a favourable impression upon her susceptible heart, and her former lover was forgotten. Long experience had taught her that it was no very easy task to blind the ogre eyes of her sister-in-law, whose quick-sightedness had detected the early symptoms of her passion for the former secretary, and arranged for his dismissal in consequence. She determined, therefore, to be more prudent with his successor. Full of this resolution, she joined the breakfast-table on the following morning, and was delighted to find that our hero, as she thonght, understood her tactics. Instead of paying him the least attention, she devoted herself to her female companion, an unpretending old maid, whom she engaged as a foil to her own, as she fancied, superior charms.

"What is your opinion now?" demanded the earl, of his lady, as soon as the party had retired from the breakfast room. "You saw they scarcely spoke together."

"So much the worse, my lord. I should have been better pleased had they conversed as unreservedly as yesterday," replied his more subtle wife. "The change is too sudden to be without some design."

"But you saw that he was absolutely attentive to Miss Wilton. Pen must have seen it too, and yet she remained perfectly composed; nay, treated her dependant with more than usual civility. Not one sarcasm, not one word by which women, no matter what age, resent a slight!"

"Pooh! the effect of a preconcerted arrangement. Your sister is an experienced hand at carrying on a flirtation."

"But Fitzgerald is too young," nrged the peer, who dreaded losing his talented secretary, "to be so perfectly master of the art of deception; and Pen too old and too deficient in personal attractions to have any charm for him."

"She is rich," significantly answered the countess.

"True; but he is not poor, for he positively declined all pecuniary remuneration for his services."

"A mere blind," said her ladyship; "he has doubtless heard of your sister's propensity of falling in love with every good-looking man she meets; and has contrived to get introduced to the family on a matrimonial speculation. A plot of old Lord Bamff's, to provide for some needy relative or beggarly dependant."

"Not so," continued the peer; "Digby assures me that his expenditure at the university was that of a gentleman, that he was the associate of Pitt, and had letters of introduction from Lord Chatham; he cannot be a mere adventurer—impossible."

"Digby, my lord, is a mere fool, with as little knowledge of the world as a child who has just entered it. Mr. Fitzgerald," she added, in a determined tone, "must quit the house."

"But how am I to get rid of him?" exclaimed the hen-pecked husband. "It is quite impossible to tell him to go as you would a servant. Besides, I should lose Bamff's vote, which is so useful."

"Better that than your sister's fortune," quietly answered her despotic ladyship. "As for getting rid of him, leave that to me. You shall not in any way be compromised. He must have more courage and assurance than I give him credit for, if he ventures to remain in this house after I have decided that he shall depart."

"But consider, my love!" exclaimed the peer.

"I have considered and decided," interrupted the countess. "Fear not; his leaving shall seem his own act. The contingent good which may accrue from your lordship's political schemes—in which, to speak the truth, I have not much faith—is not to be balanced against the loss of your sister's fortune. Please to remember that."

It was finally arranged between her manœuvring ladyship and obedient lord that Fitzgerald should, at all events, be got rid of; politely, if possible, but decidedly. In consequence of this preconcerted scheme, our hero began to be annoyed by trifling negligences and impertinences on the part of the domestics, who had received their cue from their lady's waiting maid. At first he attributed it to the confusion which generally reigns in an ill-regulated household, to accident, or any cause but the right one; for Lord Erringcourt continued his confidence, and the countess treated him with the most scrupulous politeness.

It was a few days after the system of annoyance had been put in practice that her ladyship's tactics further developed themselves. The usual family party were seated in the dining-room, and our hero had just addressed a few complimentary remarks to Lady Penelope, in order, good-naturedly, to distract her attention from her dependant, whom she was quietly tormenting, when the countess broke ground.

"My dear Pen," she exclaimed, in an affectionate tone, "have you heard that the Hargraves are coming on a visit for a few weeks?"

The speaker had written purposely to invite them.

"No," drily answered her sister-in-law, whom long experience had put upon her guard against the tender familiarity of her clever relative; "I never dreamt that you expected them."

"Oh! yes, dear. The visit has been promised these two years, and when they wrote to say that they were coming, I could not, in decency, refuse them. By the bye," she added, in her blandest tone of voice, "I am afraid, Mr. Fitzgerald, that you will be very angry with me, for I have absolutely arranged that poor Mrs. Hargrave shall have your room. She is such an invalid, the fatigue of a second flight of stairs would be too much for her; therefore I——"

"Oh! pray, countess, make no apology," answered the unsuspicious Fitzgerald; "put me any where. I will give orders to have my trunks removed. A bachelor is easily packed away."

"But where are they to be packed to?" demanded the earl, who had received his cue from his lady; "I trust you have found a suitable apartment for Mr. Fitzgerald?"

"Oh, yes. Milton, the housekeeper, says it is a very good room; Willis, your valet, has had it during the season; but he must sleep in the coachman's room. So you will let Mr. Fitzgerald's trunks be removed," she added, turning to the domestic.

"Where to, my lady?" demanded the man.

"To St. James's Hotel," interrupted our hero, the blood rushing to his forehead at the insult, so politely and elaborately contrived. "My lord," he continued, as soon as the butler left the apartment, "when at your personal request I entered your family, I did not expect to be treated with this cool impertinence."

"Impertinence!" iterated his lordship, turning very pale, whilst his lady acted the part of a person very much astonished. "My dear Mr. Fitzgerald, I——"

"I regret to repeat it, my lord—impertinence. For several days your servants have pursued a system of neglect and rudeness, which is now accounted for. I put it to your lordship's sense of honour, if it would not have been better—more worthy of your station—frankly to have intimated that our compact was at an end, than by a series of petty insults have compelled me to break it? Paltry, my lord, mean and paltry!"

"Really, I do not comprehend," faltered Lord Erringcourt.

"Evidently you do not, my lord," continued Fitzgerald; "for if you had understood either my position in life or my character, you would not have offered me this unworthy treatment. Before the ladies, any further explanation would be equally in bad taste with the rudeness offered. My lord, good day."

The speaker bowed proudly to the peer, and most profoundly to the countess, whom he affected to treat as a mere tool in the affair, and quitted the mansion.

"Well!" exclaimed her ladyship; "how very extraordinary, quite romantic, and all for the change of an apartment! What will servants presume to next? We shall have the chaplain inviting his friends to our table, and the house-steward prescribing when we are to dine."

"Devilish unpleasant!" muttered his lordship, who was vexed at the loss of his talented secretary. "I don't know where to replace him."

Lady Penelope had been a silent, though not an uninterested, witness of the proceedings of her manœuvring sister-in-law. The veil, however, was too transparent to deceive her respecting the motives, and she determined at once to assert her independence by breaking the fetters which for so many years had fettered her.

"Really, my dear countess," she exclaimed, "I am sorry you did not name the visit of the Hargraves sooner, as it would enable me to relieve you of one or two of your guests by receiving them at my establishment. When do they arrive?"

"At your establishment!" said the earl. "What establishment? I don't understand you."

"At the one I am about to form," continued his

eister, in the same affectionate tone of voice. "I have too long been a burden to you."

"Not in the least."

"Interfered," she added, "with your domestic comforts."

"Contribnted to them, my sweet Pen," exclaimed the countess—"contribnted to them."

"One thing at least is certain. But for me this inconvenience with respect to Mr. Fitzgerald would not have occurred—you wonld have had my room for the Hargraves. I must, therefore, paintul as will be the separation, tear myself away. I think I saw a house in the sqnare which will just suit me."

Her sister-in-law interrupted her by protesting against her leaving, assuring her that the whole honse was at her disposal, and that she should be miserable without her.

"It will doubtless be a severe pang at first for both of us," coolly replied Lady Penelope, "but time will reconcile us to the pain of separation; besides, the square is so near that we can still see each other daily."

"Consider," said the earl; "what will the world say if you leave the protection of your brother's honse?"

"A lonely, nnprotected female," iterated the countess.

"But quite old enongh, my sweet sister, to take care of myself; and as for the world, it can say no more of me than it does of many other single ladies of rank who keep their own establishments."

"Consider the expenses—the trouble."

"I have considered them," answered her ladyship, in the same even tone, for she was determined not to quarrel, "and find that my fortune will more than meet them."

As this was a fact which admitted of no dispute, the countess was nonplussed. In vain did she afterwards try flattery, caresses, and remonstrance—the maiden lady was proof against all three, and finally retreated to her own room, accompanied by her female companion, victorious.

Lord and Lady Erringconrt gazed on each other in silence after her departure. The former was the first to speak.

"I am afraid we have gone too far; we shall certainly lose her."

"Would that were all," replied her ladyship—"her fortune. Can you not exert your authority?"

"It would be useless. From her childhood a more obstinate creatnre never breathed; once resolved, nothing can turn her. She will marry the fellow, I am certain; and I shall lose not only my secretary, but my sister and her fortuue."

"Could you not invent some tale to account for the fellow's dismissal?"

"Truth itself," observed Lady Erringcourt, "would fail to convince your sister of any imperfection in the character of this Fitzgerald, if she is, as I fear, really attached to him; our neighbours in France would easily settle the affair—a *lettre de cachet* would——"

"Lady Erringcourt," interposed his lordship, speaking in his most constitutional tone of voice, "in England we know of no such proceedings; the liberty of the meanest subject is held as sacred as the proudest."

"Spare me an harangue!" exclaimed the peeress; "reserve that for *your* house—in *mine* let me have common sense. After all, I fear we must let Pen take her own course, and rely upon the chapter of accidents to counteract this adventurer's design upon her fortune."

A servant announced Mr. Digby.

"How! uncle and aunt *tete-à-tete?*" said the young man, as he entered the dining-room. "I trust I do not interrupt you. But where is Fitzgerald—where aunt Pen and her companion?"

"The ladies are in the boudoir," replied the countess. "As for your precious friend, you will find him at St. James's Hotel. He is a designing, unprincipled villain."

"Who? Fitzgerald! Impossible! Upon my life, you wrong him. Speak, my lord: men do not lightly accuse each other of dishonourable actions—women are passionate, and are scarcely ever impartial. In what has my friend merited the reproaches of her ladyship? If he has really acted dishonourably—which I cannot, except upon the strongest evidence, believe—I shall be as ready as your lordship to condemn and resent it. At present his character stands too high to be lightly blasted."

"I confess I am too much inflamed to judge dispassionately of the affair," replied Lord Erringcourt, "for, as the head of the family, I am naturally sensitive where its honour is concerned."

"Who dares impeach it?" demanded Digby, flushing with anger; "does Fitzgerald? if so, he must answer to me, my lord."

"You must be speedy then," replied the countess, whose active mind seized on the idea of involving the young men in a duel, in which case the death of either would answer her purpose. "In a few days it will be too late, as by that time, in all probability, the gentleman will be your uncle."

Digby laughed heartily at the explanation, which at once relieved his fears for Fitzgerald's honour, and amused him by its absurdity. At first he believed that, urged by ambition, which he took to be the guiding star of his friend's existence, he had been led to sacrifice the character, and political character, of his uncle to some scheme for his own advantage. The only fear removed which he could rationally entertain, he was greatly amused by the accusation, for he had long been aware of the jealous care with which his relatives watched his aunt Pen, as well as the old maid's peculiar susceptibility of the tender passion. He doubted not but that she had alarmed his uncle and aunt by some ridiculous scene, and exposed his friend to their absurd suspicions.

"You seem amused, Digby," exclaimed the earl, pettishly; "is a mis-alliance so indifferent to you?"

"To say nothing of other prospects," added the countess. "Would any man in his senses, except yourself, laugh at the chance of a fortune being lost to him, and to a low-bred, unknown fellow like this Fitzgerald—a man without family or fortune?"

"Pardon me, my dear aunt," said Digby, "but Mr. Fitzgerald's family is as noble as your own; and as for fortune, whilst at the university his expenditure was princely, his credit with his banker unlimited. Lord Chatham himself told me that the personal wealth of his grandfather would purchase the fee simple of an earldom. You may therefore guess what chance poor aunt Penelope has of achieving such a conquest."

"A likely story," said her ladyship, whose suspicions, however, were considerably shaken; "if rich as you describe him, why did he accept the office of secretary?"

"That, too, I can answer," continued her nephew. "Because he is ambitious of distinguishing himself as a politician, and wished, from the presumed influence of my uncle, to be introduced to a seat in the lower house, which present circumstances, despite his wealth, render difficult."

"But still there is a mystery," observed the earl sharply.

"Which I will explain, and you at once comprehend, when I tell you that my friend's grandfather is the representative of the house of Derwentwater. Lord Chatham, but for the strong prejudice of the king against his family, would have introduced him to a seat long since. True, he might purchase one; but that, from a high sense of honour, he declines."

"Excessively unpleasant," exclaimed the earl, impatiently pacing up and down the room. "I stand committed with Lord Bamff, whose vote in the Scotch peers' election is so useful. I have insulted, or rather permitted my servants to annoy, a man whose talent I might have employed, and who contains within himself the nucleus of a formidable opposition. I have affronted my sister, who leaves me in consequence; and all, countess, through your unjust suspicions."

"Say your own folly, my lord," retorted her ladyship; "ask yourself whose imprudence it was rendered it an object to preserve your sister's fortune in the family. What have all your clever political schemes produced?—embarrassment and disappointment."

This was a home thrust for the peer, who had often been obliged to acknowledge to himself that his presumed influence in the state was really nothing.

"Well," said Digby, rising, "I must leave you to arrange the blame between you; I will first pay my respects to aunt Pen, and then seek my friend at his hotel."

"Do you think Fitzgerald might be induced to return, by an explanation or an apology?" demanded the earl, who began to feel uneasy at the manner in which his late secretary might think fit to resent the treatment he had received.

"Not by me, my lord," replied Digby, firmly; "I never approved of his position here; it was false and unworthy of his talents: for his sake I am glad it has terminated."

"At least you cannot object to bear my apologies to your friend," added the earl, "and say how happy I shall be to meet him again. You may also add those of the countess."

"I have no objection to be the bearer of your apologies, uncle, because I consider them due to my friend; but as to any political reconciliation, I tell you frankly, if I have any influence, I shall use it against you."

With this blunt expression of his opinion and intentions, Digby quitted the room.

"Conceited fool!" muttered the peer, as he left the apartment, "with his ridiculous theories of honour and independence. From his influence with Fitzgerald he might be of service to me, could I but persuade him to attempt a reconciliation between us. I fear we have made but a foolish affair of it, countess. Go to my sister," he added, "and see if she still holds her purpose. If she does, the sooner she puts it into execution the better."

"Would it not be as well to tell her of the probable return of Fitzgerald?" said Lady Erringcourt. "We could watch them here better than at her own house. Besides, since Digby's explanation, I feel perfectly at ease respecting the intentions of his friend. The chance of meeting him again might possibly induce her to remain."

"Any thing you think for the best," answered her husband. "But the affair appears to me to be so hopeless that I leave it entirely in your hands."

With this understanding they parted—his lordship to his library, to rehearse his speech for the evening exhibition in the House of Lords; his lady to try her powers of persuasion upon the resolution of her wealthy sister-in-law.

Digby found Lady Penelope alone in her boudoir, and so deeply absorbed in reflection that she scarcely perceived his entrance. From many little attentions and acts of kindness which he had rendered her, he stood high in her favour, and it was not without misgiving that she beheld him come—at the wish, as she supposed, of her brother and sister-in-law—to persuade her from her determination. She resolved, therefore, like a good general, to anticipate the attack.

"It is of no use, nephew," she exclaimed, as she held out her hand to welcome him; "you will find me proof against even your eloquence. Oblige me, therefore, as you cannot judge the motives of my resolution, not to condemn it; for it is only upon mature deliberation that I have decided on the step which I am about to take, and which, however strange it may appear to you, I find absolutely necessary."

"Strange! my dear aunt! I see nothing strange in it," replied the frank, kind-hearted young man; "you are quite rich enough to have a separate establishment, and, I am certain, will be much happier than here, where, truth compels me to say, you have been made more an object of speculation than affection."

"Exactly so," replied Lady Penelope, rejoiced to find an ally where she expected an opponent. "My sister-in-law's jealous watchfulness is no longer to be borne. Interest, and not affection, has been the motive of her entire conduct towards me. My present difficulty is, how to arrange my affairs; for a woman is ill-suited to the trouble of forming an establishment, and it were vain to expect my brother's assistance."

The tone of helplessness in which she spoke affected Digby, whose heart, despite his cynical temper, was full of the kindlier feelings of human nature.

"I have some little experience in these matters, and will render you any assistance in my power," he observed; "so keep up your spirits, and to-morrow, at twelve, I will call for you upon a house-hunting expedition. At present I must leave you."

"Where for?"

"St. James's Hotel, to see Fitzgerald."

"Ah, Digby!" exclaimed our hero, who was comfortably taking his coffee at the hotel when his friend arrived; "this is kind; will you join me, or shall I ring for wine?"

"Coffee by all means," said his visitor. "Come, put your book aside, for I have come to spend the evening with you, but first let me deliver a message from my most absurd uncle and repentant aunt."

"Message," said Fitzgerald; "what is it?"

"Of apology and conciliation, of course, or I should not have been the bearer of it. Imagine, therefore, in diplomatic phrase, that the earl has made the necessary concession through me, his accredited representative, and solicits that amicable relations may be renewed. What answer am I to return?"

"That I accept his apology frankly—the more so as it relieves me of an alternative which would have been painful on your account. If by amicable relations his lordship means that I should consent to a renewal of our late compact as patron and secretary, I must at once refuse; for the man who can once forget the respect due to the dignity of a gentleman, may be guilty of the violation a second time."

"Right, my dear Fitzgerald; the decision is worthy of you—just what I wished—expected. I gave the message merely to try you."

"Indeed!"

"I told my uncle that I would deliver the apology; but the proffer of reconciliation I refused."

"From a doubt of my firmness?" demanded Fitzgerald.

"No, no—not exactly that; in short, you know the opinion I have formed of you is from no judgment formed of yourself, but from a theory which I laid down long before I had the pleasure of knowing you, and to which I am become so wedded that I verily believe I would die to maintain it at the stake. Every fresh proof which I receive of your high principle only shows me how evenly the two qualities of honour and ambition may be balanced: in a mind less purely constituted, the latter would, I fear, predominate."

"You are a strange being, Digby, and say strange things; but I have known you now too long to quarrel with your eccentricities. Judge of me as you please. You will be surprised when I tell you that to-morrow I start for Cambridge."

"For Cambridge! What to do?"

"Stand for a fellowship. The fact is, I have quarrelled with my grandfather, whom, whilst a boy I permitted to exercise an authority over my actions repugnant to my feelings as a man."

"And has he withdrawn your income?" demanded Digby, deeply interested in the intelligence.

"Really," replied his friend, with a smile, "I have not felt curiosity sufficient to ascertain the fact, especially as I could not accept it under existing circumstances; it would be at the price of my independence."

"He must be a strange character," said Digby, musingly.

"I have already told you that he is so."

"This may inconvenience you. I am rich—command me. Better be my debtor than under obligations to your tradesmen."

"I have no debts," replied our hero, gravely.

"At any rate, you will require a credit at Cambridge; not that I doubt of your success for the fellowship.

Let me go to your banker; the loan need only be temporary."

"Not for an hour, Digby," replied Fitzgerald; "I told you that I would be independent: to contract a debt even with a friend is not the way to become so. And now, although I give you credit for making the offer in perfect friendship, I will candidly tell you that, much as I esteem you, you are the last man to whom I would willingly be indebted."

"Indeed! Why so?" demanded his visitor.

"Because there is a principle of suspicion in your theory, which would induce you to weigh and doubt the propriety of my having accepted the offer you now so liberally make. I remember," added the speaker, "a saying of yours at college: 'Debtor and creditor should never be the relative position of friends."

"Pshaw!" interrupted Digby; "that was an idle phrase."

"But still a true one. I thought so then, I think so now."

"I wish we had met sooner," exclaimed the cynic; "it might have been better for both of us. Is it just, Fitzgerald, to remember a sentiment which strikes at the root of confidence, uttered in a moment of thoughtlessness—perhaps irritability?"

"Such are the moments in which the secret opinions formed by reflection or intercourse with the world are most likely to appear. All the results of our study of human nature are not woven, like a motley garment, to attract the eyes of man; it is only in some unguarded hour that we suffer them to appear."

"You must have read the world deeply, if not favourably," observed Digby.

"At least, you must admit that I have read it rightly?"

"I will not dispute it with you," replied the cynic. "'Twas wrong," he added, in a tone of mortification, "to press the offer of my services as I have done; you have, doubtless, other and more esteemed friends, and do not require my assistance."

Our hero felt annoyed at the insinuation, especially coming from Digby, to whom he was perhaps more strongly attached than to any human being except Ellen—his lost, idolised Ellen; and he answered him in a tone of unusual bitterness.

"I will answer you candidly, although your suspicions, and, I regret to add, your *finesse*, scarcely deserve it. I have no friend of whom I could ask a favour, or accept the offer which I have just received from you; and *I do want assistance*, for fifty pounds at this moment constitutes all my wealth. Your suspicions, I trust, are answered."

"Suspicions!" exclaimed Digby, deeply moved.

"Ay—suspicions. You wished to ascertain whether I rejected your offer from not requiring it, or from principle. Ever loth to give to human nature credit for self-respect, you would attribute, even to the man you call your friend, ignoble motives for his noblest actions Such conduct may be prudent, may be philosophic; but believe me, sir, it strikes at the root of friendship."

"Fitzgerald," exclaimed his agitated friend, "you have conquered! I cast aside my suspicions, and for ever. I am at last convinced that principle has conquered the force of education, and that ambition in you is but second to the dictates of honour and of reason. Did you know why I formed these opinions, and the bitter school in which I learnt them, you would not judge me harshly. Will you, can you forgive me?"

"Most certainly," said our hero, "I forgive you."

"But you do not forget the offence?"

"Digby, I will be candid. Friendship, with me, is the growth of confidence; suspicion chills the opening flower, and one rude doubt destroys it. Confidence," he repeated, and his lip quivered slightly as he spoke, for he felt his loneliness in the world, "is the life, the soul of friendship: being fled, let us consign the car case to the grave."

The cynic, cursing the suspicious nature which had insulted so true a heart, took up his hat and rushed hastily from the hotel.

A few days confirmed Digby's prediction of his friend's success; he obtained a fellowship, and returned immediately to London, for the purpose of conducting a political paper; the editorship of which had been offered him upon honourable terms. He became a distinguished man amongst the writers of the opposition, and all predicted that, on a change of ministry, the first act of the Whigs must be to provide for their most eloquent champion.

He had but a few days commenced his editorial duties when the trial of Sedler took place at the Old Bailey for the robbery and attempt upon his life. Our hero appeared and gave his evidence on the occasion, and despite the efforts of the distinguished counsel employed upon the occasion, both Gipsy George and his companion Mike were sentenced to be hanged.

CHAPTER XV.

There is no trust except in honesty.
The villain's oath is weaker than a straw
To bind his promise. He will swear and lie
But for the thriftless profit of deceit.

No sooner had the judges pronounced the fearful sentence which consigned two guilty but *ignorant* human beings to that worst of all earthly inventions, the gallows, than Mr. Prim hastened from the court, while the prisoners were being removed, in order to meet them on their return to Newgate. Since the visit of Sir Walter Mowbray he had been a frequent visitor at the prison—*dined twice* with the governor supped with the chaplain, and held several confidential interviews with the sheriff, a wealthy cheesemonger, whose sole ambition was to be knighted—an honour which the lawyer obligingly intimated he was soon likely to obtain.

It was evident to Sedler that his old companion in crime had become a person of importance with those to whose care he was consigned, and his hopes grew strong accordingly.

"I suppose it's all right?" whispered Sedler to the lawyer, as he was being marched across the courtyard of the prison towards the condemned cell. "But the black beak seemed terribly in earnest."

"Right!" repeated Prim, quietly rubbing his hands. "Of course it's all right. Do you think that either I or Sir Walter would deceive you?"

This was asked in a tone of mockery so fine, that the gipsy did not perceive it; still he felt but partially re-assured. One thing was certain, that there he stood, a convicted felon, condemned to die—to breathe forth his soul upon the gallows, amid the gaze of thousands of his fellow-creatures assembled before the prison as for a holiday; and nothing but the unwitnessed promise of a man, whom he knew to be a heartless persecutor, between him and death, no wonder that he feared and doubted.

a messenger for an eminent solicitor, with whom he had become acquainted whilst conducting his political paper.

In less than an hour the physician, together with the lawyer and his clerk, were assembled in the sick man's chamber, and a power of attorney duly signed by which the management of the household was vested in Fitzgerald. The ink was scarcely dry when Mr. Grabblestain returned; his rage and dismay can be better imagined than described, when, on entering his uncle's chamber, he found him surrounded by so many persons, and he determined to discharge the servant for disobedience to his orders.

"I know not, gentlemen, why I find you here," he said, with as much coolness as he could command; "but I must insist that you retire. I cannot permit the sick chamber of my dear uncle to be made a mere gossipping club of."

"Bah!" growled the sick man; "dear uncle! ha! ha! ha!"

"I am here as his physician," replied Dr. Howland, "and shall not depart till my duty to my patient is performed; and I feel it my duty to state that he has been shamefully and cruelly neglected."

"And I," added the solicitor, addressing the mortified Grabblestain, "am present as the legal adviser of your uncle, in whose name I command you to give up the keys of the cabinet, most improperly obtained, and that you instantly quit the house where you have exercised an unwarrantable authority."

"Indeed, sir!" exclaimed the nephew, pale with rage; "I shall not. Mr. Fitzgerald is come for the picture, I suppose, but I shall disappoint him. My uncle is a lunatic, incapable of managing his affairs, far less of delegating his powers to another. Quit the house peaceably, or I shall summon aid to assist me in expelling you."

"See," cried the physician, rushing to the bed-side and calling the attention of the party to the dying man; "see, sir, you have destroyed your uncle by your unnatural violence!"

The speaker's words were true; the agitation caused by the scene, and the impotent rage of the old man, had proved too much for his exhausted frame. He endeavoured to speak, but could only utter an inarticulate growl, and expired, pressing the hand of Fitzgerald, and pointing to the cabinet.

Mr. Grabblestain, when all was over, either felt, or

affected to be, ashamed of his violence. The high character of Doctor Howland would, he knew, give great weight to any statement he might make, to his prejudice, and interfere with his prospects of the reversion of the title, now the sole object of his ambition; for, anomalous as the character may appear, he was not less vain of his descent from the old house of Bamff than avaricious. He ascribed his vehemence, therefore, to his fears of exposing the infirmities of his deceased uncle, and even consented to the affixing of the seals of the parties present to the cabinet in question; promising that if, upon examination, it contained papers belonging to Mr. Fitzgerald, he would faithfully deliver them, and that the seals should not be broken till the day of the funeral, and in his presence.

With this promise our hero was obliged to rest content. Much as he doubted Grabblestain, he knew that he was too prudent to violate a promise so solemnly given, and before such witnesses as Dr. Howland and the lawyer.

The morning of the funeral at last arrived, and Mr. Duncan Grabblestain, in all the well-dressed paraphernalia of woe, received the mourners graciously; although, with his usual eye to economy, very few had been asked. Previous to the procession starting, Lord Selkirk and Judge Burton arrived; although not invited by the heir, they had thought proper to attend.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," faltered Grabblestain.

"Why, ay, young man," replied the judge coolly, "I am thinking that, considering our old friendship with your uncle, you might have invited us to his funeral."

Grabblestain muttered something about privacy and the wishes of the dear deceased.

The judge and Lord Selkirk both eyed him with an expression of sarcastic humour, which under any other circumstances would have been risible; at least our hero thought so.

"That is not the worst part of your conduct," resumed the judge; "Dr. Howland talks of gross neglect. We will examine into that by and by."

Grabblestain began to think the friend of his uncle was a prosy old bore, and longed to order him from the house; but a sentiment of decency restrained him.

"Mr. Fitzgerald," said Lord Selkirk, extending his hand to our hero, "I am happy to meet you here. This is as it should be—very thoughtful of Mr. Grabblestain to invite you here."

"Very," echoed the judge.

Again the same half-suppressed smile played round the lips of each. Fitzgerald felt surprised at the distinction with which Lord Selkirk had treated him, never having been previously introduced, or even having met his lordship before.

The melancholy service over, the party returned to the house of the deceased, and at once adjourned to the room in which Lord Bamff had expired.

"How is this!" exclaimed the judge; "only one cabinet sealed—very improper!"

"Very," echoed Lord Selkirk.

"The property being entailed, I did not think it necessary to fix the usual seals," replied Mr. Grabblestain tartly; for he began to be tired of the remarks of his late uncle's very particular friends. "This cabinet was only sealed," he added, "in consequence of an assertion that it contained papers belonging to this gentleman, Mr. Fitzgerald. As next of kin, and the undoubted heir of the deceased, I break the seals."

Upon examination, the cabinet was found to contain, amongst title deeds and other papers, a packet labelled "The property of Richard Radcliff, respecting the birth of his grandson."

"They are mine, give them to me," exclaimed Fitzgerald eagerly.

"I must be sure of that," answered the heir, coolly. "The late Mr. Radcliff never mentioned you in his will. You must first prove your title to them."

"At any rate," said Judge Burton, quietly taking them from the hands of the triumphant heir, "they are not yours; I shall see that they find their right owner."

The speaker put them in his pocket as he concluded.

"This is too much for human patience," exclaimed the enraged Grabblestain, furious at being baulked in his project of humbling and possibly injuring Fitzgerald. "Return those papers, my lord; you exceed your privilege. You have no right, although a judge, to take possession of property not belonging to you."

"In my capacity of a judge, certainly not," replied his lordship, smiling; "but I have an undisputed right to do so as one of your late uncle's executors."

"Executor! executor!" iterated Grabblestain, turning very pale; for he began to fear that his uncle might have saved money from the estates, and willed it from him. "What, in the name of Heaven, had my uncle to leave? All the property is entailed."

"You shall hear," replied his lordship, drawing the will of his old friend from his pocket; "proper that you should, as you are interested in it."

"Very proper," echoed Lord Selkirk, whose conversation was generally limited to echoing the remarks of his brother judge, he being himself one of the lords of session in Scotland.

Judge Burton broke the seals in the presence of the assembled party, and read as follows:—

"I, John, Earl of Bamff, of Bamff Castle, do give all my estates, real and personal, whereseever and whatsoever, unto Gerald Fitzgerald, Esquire, grandson of my old and valued friend Richard Radcliff, Esquire, formerly styled the Honourable Richard Radcliff, of Dalsel, Northumberland."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Grabblestain, his face deadly pale, and cold drops of perspiration trickling down his forehead; "your lordship knows that the estates are entailed; that paper is worthless."

"*Not one of them*," answered the judge; "the entail was cut off by your grandfather. I have all the title-deeds in my possession. Your late uncle was free to will them as he pleased. Mr. Fitzgerald," he added, shaking our astonished hero by the hand, "I wish you joy of your fortune—fourteen thousand a year besides the personals."

"I'll not resign my right," cried Grabblestain, furiously. "As heir-at-law, my name should have been mentioned in the will."

"So it should," quietly observed Lord Selkirk.

"*So it is*," chimed in Judge Burton, who seemed to take a malicious pleasure in tormenting Grabblestain, whose brutal treatment of Lord Bamff he bitterly resented; "here is a codicil, which I added to the will at the request of my old friend:—

"'And whereas my dear nephew, Duncan Grabblestain, has lately evinced a love for the fine arts, of which I did not heretofore judge him capable, I will and bequeath to him *a certain picture by Albano*, hanging in the dining-room, begging he will accept it as a token of my admiration of his taste.'"

"Damnation!" roared the infuriated nephew. "No

matter, the old man was a lunatic, as I can prove by the evidence of the servants."

"Can you?" said Lord Selkirk.

"They will swear it."

"Doubtless," replied his lordship; "but as the judge and I drew the will, we are the best evidence as to the state of the testator's mind, which, unfortunately for you, was never clearer than when he signed it. Do you remember his argument, Burton, on the divisibility of matter, and its connection with mind?"

"Perfectly."

'It was beautifully lucid."

"Very," replied the judge; then turning to the disappointed Duncan, he added, "Mr. Grabblestain, if you have any thing to offer against the validity of your uncle's will, be pleased to do so through your attorney. Your legacy shall be delivered to you on your receipt for the same. At present I must leave the house, as I expect my solicitor every moment to take possession of the property and discharge the domestics, with whose conduct I am much dissatisfied."

"I will not go," sullenly replied the disappointed man.

The judge rang the bell, which was answered by one of his own servants.

"Go to Bow Street," said his master quietly, "make my compliments to the magistrate, and tell him to send two or three of his officers here directly: I may require their assistance."

Grabblestain, finding that resistance would be useless, cast a look of hatred and rage at Fitzgerald, and rushed from the house.

Our hero remained like one entranced; it seemed to him a dream that the fortune which the revengeful spirit of his grandfather had deprived him of should be thus singularly made up to him.

"Come, Mr. Fitzgerald," said the judge, arousing him from his reverie by a friendly pressure of the hand, "you appear rather overwhelmed than rejoiced at your good fortune. You must return home and dine with me; I am anxious to get rid of a responsible trust, and to surrender your estates as soon as possible."

"Perhaps, my lord," said our hero, for the first time breaking silence since the will had been read, "the proceedings of Mr. Grabblestain may render such a step premature."

"Pooh! the fellow has not a leg to stand on."

"Not one," said Lord Selkirk.

"Still I cannot comprehend," said Fitzgerald, "why his lordship should so frequently have declared to me that his estates were entailed, and lamented that he could not leave even his domestics a legacy."

"His lordship did not wish, in his old age, to be made the prey of legacy-hunters. With equal foresight, he requested my learned brother and myself to draw up his will, that in every technicality it might be perfect; and also, if necessary, to bear evidence of his sanity."

"Not an unnecessary precaution," observed our hero; "for the vulgar frequently take any deviation from the ordinary manners and habits of life as a proof of madness."

"True," said the judge, "common minds admit of no deviation from their own standard. Rest perfectly satisfied; there is not a man in England who holds his estate by a firmer tenure than yourself, and few by half so good."

The speaker was right in his conclusions, for nothing could be more legally prefect than the document by which the eccentric testator gave to Fitzgerald his large possessions. Having been disappointed in early life, and deceived where he most trusted, the naturally generous disposition of Lord Bamff became soured; he regarded all who approached him with a degree of suspicion, which if his own painful experience did not justify, it at least palliated it; and he professed poverty, in order to avoid the snares of the legacy-hunter and the attentions of the interested. It is most probable that, had his nephew treated him with even the ordinary courtesy of life, the old man would not so completely and whimsically have disinherited him; but the affair of the picture decided his fate, and, by a retaliation as tantalising as it was just, he made the disputed Albano the substitute of the splendid inheritance Grabblestain had so long and anxiously expected. The lessons which Richard Radcliff had instilled into the heart of his grandson had not so filled it with ambition but that a keen observer, like Lord Bamff, could discover the many good qualities it contained. To them, as much as to the desire of disappointing the vulgar, rapacious Grabblestain, whose conduct at the close of his uncle's life showed the utter worthlessness of his character, our hero owed the wealth which had fallen to him.

Affairs connected with his change of fortune detained him in London longer than he desired, for the metropolis had become hateful to him. The feelings of ambition, so long dormant, revived with his unexpected accession of fortune, and he bitterly repented the precipitancy with which he had entered the church, as it precluded him from a seat in parliament, where alone he could hope to distinguish himself, and from which the insane hatred of the king towards his family could not otherwise have excluded him.

Mr. Grabblestain's opposition to the will was soon withdrawn, when he found that the expense of opposing it would be as enormous as the result was hopeless. He contented himself, therefore, by reporting every slander he could invent to the disparagement of the character of the man he hated, and became, if possible, a greater miser than before.

Fitzgerald, despite his wealth, was far from happy. The fate of Ellen and her boy clouded his existence. He felt his loneliness; and the absence of Digby, whom he longed to be reconciled to, was an additional source of annoyance. Immediately after the final arrangement of his affairs he called upon Judge Burton, who had proved a valuable friend, since, but for his evidence, Grabblestain would have successfully opposed his uncle's will on the plea of insanity; for he had completely suborned the domestics of the late lord, who were ready to swear to any thing.

"Well," exclaimed the judge, as his visitor entered the room, "Grabblestain has abandoned his plea. Do you think of residing on the estate, or letting it? Fine shooting—moors well stocked."

"Neither, my lord. I shall return to my rectory," replied Fitzgerald, mournfully.

"Rectory!" exclaimed his friend—"pooh, pooh! Rectories are very good things for men without fortune; but with fourteen thousand a year, who would, at your age, abandon the pleasures of the world? You will think better of it."

"No; my mind is made up. In London I have neither friends nor ties. I feel as a mere drop amid the human ocean."

"A drop formeth a part of the whole," observed the judge, kindly.

"That do not I," replied Fitzgerald, with a sigh. "My feelings are changed. The path I would have

followed, and, I think, should have been successful in, is closed to me."

"You mean politics?"

"I do," replied his visitor.

"Pooh!" said the judge; "there are few things impossible to a man who has fourteen thousand a year, to say nothing of an enormous sum in ready money. You have talent as a political writer—poor Bamff told me so. Attack the ministry; they can't last long. Write against the Catholics, or for them, as will most embarrass the government; in short, never let it rest till they either repeal the absurd law which excludes men in orders from the lower house, or make a bishop of you."

"Quite hopeless, my lord," replied Fitzgerald. "Had I only difficulties of an ordinary character to contend with, I might, perhaps, find courage to persevere; but my haste in entering the church has closed the avenue to political distinction against me for ever. My descent from the unfortunate Derwentwaters I need not relate; but perhaps you have yet to learn that I am in consequence an object of personal dislike to his majesty, who has on more than one occasion expressed his regret at the act of clemency which allowed my grandfather to return to England, and invested me with the privileges of a British subject. But for this prejudice Lord Chatham would have introduced me into public life. Your lordship, knowing the temper of the king, can judge what chance there is of ever overcoming his frequently expressed hostility to my race and blood."

"Truly not much," said the judge, "not much; for his gracious majesty, with all dutiful and loyal respect be it spoken, is as obstinate as a mule."

"You perceive, then, that a country life is, after all, my best plan. True that, with my present fortune, in London I might lead the life of a sensualist; but that would neither suit with my profession or character."

"Perhaps you have decided wisely," exclaimed the judge, who really felt interested in Fitzgerald's welfare. "Farewell! I must attend my duties in court. Remember, if at any time my services can be of use you may command them."

Before leaving London, our hero determined to call upon his only relative, Lady Elizabeth Radcliff; for Mr. Bouchier he scarcely considered such. He found his great aunt alone. She received him far more graciously than on the occasion of his last visit, the intelligence of his sudden accession to fortune having wonderfully mollified her resentment towards him, which, after all, had been more assumed, to prevent his making any claim upon her generosity, than from any real displeasure.

Perhaps it may be a matter of surprise how, at her time of life, it was a consideration how she expended her newly-acquired wealth. The old lady was in love. The handsome person of her heir—the penniless Mr. Bouchier—had melted the frost of nearly seventy winters, and made an impression on her virgin heart; and the fascinating gentleman was given to understand that it would be his own fault if he did not immediately enjoy the fortune in which he held at present a reversionary interest. He was too poor to consult his taste, and too fond of the indulgences of wealth to withstand its temptations. The hint was graciously seized, the proposal made and accepted.

"Well, Fitzgerald," said her ladyship, "I give you joy. It was very kind of poor dear Lord Bamff, but very mortifying to his nephew. I dare say your grandfather was privy to the fact, which accounts for his making no provision for you in his will, which no doubt you naturally expected."

"Why," replied her visitor, with a quiet smile, "I must confess I was weak enough to expect it; but let us drop the subject of my grandfather's abandonment of me, and the disposition of his fortune. The object of my visit is to ask if I can in any way contribute to your comfort; for a female of your advanced age must require the advice and occasionally the assistance of a friend. If a residence on either of my estates in Scotland would suit your views, they are at your service."

"Thank you, Fitzgerald," replied the lady, drily, not much pleased at the unfortunate allusion to her age, "but I have made my arrangements."

"May I ask what they are?"

"Certainly," said the wealthy old maid, demurely, "especially as they must soon be known to the world—that is, as soon as etiquette will permit. Mr. Bouchier has made me an offer of his hand; and, won by his solicitations," she added, laughingly, "I have consented to be his."

"Well, aunt," exclaimed our hero, smiling, "this is an arrangement, I must confess, I did not expect. Consider your age."

"Age! Mr. Fitzgerald," repeated the lady, with a toss of the head, which was really amusing.

"Why, he is only thirty-three."

"I know it."

"And you are——"

"You are getting rude, sir," interrupted Lady Elizabeth, not willing to listen to the contrast.

"Seventy, or nearly so. However," he added, "as by my grandfather's will the property must be yours while you live, I am the less uneasy at the thought of what will be the result of your preposterous marriage."

"Preposterous!" echoed the lady, indignantly.

"You have my opinion, Lady Elizabeth. I am sorry if it offends you, but I cannot qualify it. Adieu!"

The speaker quitted the room, and the next day started for the solitude of his rectory.

CHAPTER XVII.

Where rank weeds grow, sweet flowers are sometimes found;
The nettle oft is neighbour to the rose,
And generous natures may their nurture draw
From the same fount as vice.

IMMEDIATELY after the death of her dear lamb, as Mrs. Sedler poetically designated her late husband, the disconsolate widow resolved, as she confidentially said to Mr. Aaron Wolf, to put temptation out of her own and the children's way, by removing at once from the Rising Sun, which, with her usual shrewdness, she disposed of for a considerable sum just as it stood, and moved to a cottage, which she had purchased, in Bishop's Walk, Lambeth. Mrs. Sedler, or Bet Blinker—for that was her maiden name, and she had never legally changed it—had never been a mother. But with the instinct of her sex, which, even in the most degraded state, has generally some faint trace of Eden about it, she felt towards the two wretched infants committed to her husband's care all but a mother's love. Twenty times a night would she steal from the bar, leaving the girl to serve the customers—a thing she had never been known to do before—to watch them in their bed, and then return

with a smiling face and merry heart to mix liquors and draw beer for the motley crew of unfortunate beings who thronged her well-known den. It was gradually observed that the moment of her return from one of these hurried visits was the best for an old customer who was hard up to ask credit; she seldom refused, and had even been known to accord it without an oath or a pledge for future payment.

The morning before she left the house where she had resided for so many years, she called Mr. Aaron Wolf on one side, and, after giving him a glass of brandy by way of a retainer, began by lamenting her lonely unprotected state since the loss of her dear lamb.

"Vell," exclaimed the Jew, smacking his lips, "s'elp me, Abraham, I can't make it out. George vas fly to most things. Comfortably off, I should say?" he added, with an inquiring voice; "wery comfortably off?"

"Pretty well," said the widow; "nothing more."

"Vell," resumed Aaron, "for him, vot had run more risks of hanging than a gipsy's dog, to take to the road agin, ven he vas so respectably off—quite looked up to, as I may say, by the hofficers—is remarkable!"

"Very," sighed the widow.

"Then their refusal to let any one of his old pals in to see him. As I am an honest man, Bet, but I borrowed a laced hat and gold-headed cane of Blistered Solomons, and vent myself to see him. Vot do you think the blaguard of a turnkey axed me?"

"Lord knows."

"Vether I vas come to bid for his clothes."

"And if you had," exclaimed Bet, "you need not have been ashamed of it, for they were nearly new. I paid two couter and a bob for his coat and kickses only two months afore. They were fit," she added, with an air of pride, "for any man to be hanged in; wouldn't have disgraced a lord. But 'taint that—'taint that."

"Vell, vot is it, then? 'Pon my soul, Bet, bnt you're a fine woman. Pity you're a Christian!"

"Wot for?" demanded the widow, opening her eyes wider than usual at the observation.

"Vy, you see, I couldn't marry a Christian—that's all. I sticks to my religion—buys and sells—eats no pork—and can't marry a strange voman. But vat is it you vont?"

"A hackney coach," whispered Bet.

"A vot?"

"A hackney coach," repeated the woman.

"Vell, that is extraordinary. Here have I been a customer for ten years, off and on (the speaker alluded to certain intervals he had passed in retirement), and never seed a hackney coach at the door of the Rising Snn before. Vere are you going to?"

"That's my affair," said the woman, sharply; "will you go for me?"

"Vell, vell, don't be so uppish!" exclaimed the Jew; "it's more than that I'd do for you, Mistress Sedler."

In the course of half an hour the coach was at the door, and the gipey's widow, dressed like a respectable dame, with a small box under her arm, took her seat, and, in answer to the jarvey's demand of "Where to?" answered without hesitation "The city," and away they drove.

"There's some mystery in this," muttered the respectable Mr. Aaron Wolf, half aloud.

"I thinks there is," whispered Michael Flash, the landlord of the Rising Snn that was to be; a ferocious looking fellow, who had long been engaged in supplying false coin and forged notes to the numerous smashers who infested the metropolis, and who annually supplied a crop of victims for the gallows, whilst he, the tempter who speculated upon their hnnger and misery, was daily growing rich at their expense. He was too prudent ever to attempt to pass any of his counterfeit merchandise himself, or to engage in the mannfacture. It was generally sent to him from the great fabric in Birmingham, and he had a depot in the city, the discovery of which had hitherto baffled the search of the most active officers. Still his business was a dangerous one; and having made a considerable sum, he had invested a part of in the purchase of the public house. He had not haggled with the widow respecting the price, as he and his partner, the respectable Mr. Aaron Wolf, had decided upon robbing the woman of the cash that very night. If necessary, they were prepared to add murder to burglary.

"After her," said Flash; "double the dodge."

His companion perfectly understood him, and catching up his hat, bolted through the half-hatch, or rather over it; for in his haste he could not wait to draw the bolts. The coach, from the broken nature of the ground, was still in sight, rolling lazily along; indeed, who ever saw a hackney coach progress otherwise? Their gallop was never swifter than the trot of a tortoise or the waddle of a plethoric alderman; and the active Israelite found no difficulty in overtaking it. In about three hours he returned. Michael Flash was smoking his pipe before the door, expecting him.

"Well?" he growled, puffing at the same time the smoke from his sallow cheeks.

"Vell!" repeated Aaron; "it aint vell. Ve are done."

"Brown?" said Flash.

"That's it, and no mistake; "vhere do you think the artful trull has been?"

"Not to the beak?"

"Vus; to the bank."

"The bank!" exclaimed his companion, and his complexion suddenly became of a dirty waxen hue. "The bank! not with my notes?"

"Every vun of 'em."

"Then I'm sold. Damn her!" he added, ferociously; "do you think she has blown the gaff?"

"Can't say. How many flimseys did you plant?"

"Five twenties," replied the smasher. "I'm off."

"Qnite as vell," said the Jew. "Vhere's the plant?"

"All right."

With these words the two worthies entered the house, and made their way up stairs to the widow's room. As Flash was known to have purchased the establishment that very morning, and to have paid for it, no objection was made to his proceedings: the wretches below concluded that it was all right. On entering the chamber, they saw at once what had been the motive of Bet's visit to the city. Her strong box, which in her husband's time had been a subject of speculatien to many a daring burglar, was open—the key in the lid; in fact, the prudent landlady had taken her wealth, the accumulation of years of crime and daring, to invest it in her own name in the bank. The question was, whether the notes which Flash had incautiously given her to make up the purchase money were amongst the sum.

Finding that nothing was to be done up stairs, they descended to the bar. On reaching it, they saw Bet comfortably seated at a table with the children, and

two stout-looking gentlemen by her side, whose red waistcoats caused the blood to rush to the heart of the conscious Michael Flash.

"Been *surweying* the premises?" demanded Bet, with a sarcastic smile.

"Vy, yes. No offence?"

"Quite welcome."

"Seeing as how Mike vill be landlord in the morning, he vished to ask my 'pinion about some change in the pantiles," observed Aaron Wolf.

"Not quite vot ye expected to find, I dare say," said the widow, with a grin; "but it's all right, for Mike is landlord this blessed day."

"Yer don't say so."

"I make him a present of the day in. And here," she added, "is a hansel for the house and the bottle of brandy I and these gentlemen have drank. If he is wise," she added, "he'll keep 'em as a nest-heg. Many a worse has been laid by a good hen before now."

She thrust a small roll of notes into the hand of the new landlord as she spoke. He felt by the touch, for he was an experienced hand in such matters, that they were his forged notes; and if he did not feel grateful, he felt relieved. The fact was, Bet had by some means discovered the plan which had been laid that very night for robbing, and perhaps murdering her. With her usual promptitude she had placed the temptation beyond their reach; and, with a generosity which perhaps few in her situation would have imitated, returned the villain the forgeries which would have hanged him. She knew that they were forgeries from the first.

Flash, without saying a word, walked into the inner bar; and, after carefully counting the notes to assure himself that all was right, thrust them into the fire, and watched them till they were reduced to ashes; then returning to the general room with an impudent swaggering air. Like many more civilised rascals than himself, he felt he was a safe man, and imagined that he was a respectable one.

The widow had taken a wise precaution, perhaps, in bringing a couple of Bow Street officers with her; she paid them well for the protection which their presence afforded. As furniture, stock in trade, and utensils were all included in the bargain, her arrangements were soon made. Most of her clothes she had already distributed amongst the wretched females who frequented the house. Advice she did not know how to give, nor would it have been welcome. A couple of old trunks were packed in front of the coach, and the children placed inside, who, delighted with the novelty of the ride, shouted with impatience for her to follow. Aaron Wolf and Flash, as well as the two officers, accompanied her to the vehicle, which stood at some thirty paces from the door, the ground being too broken and rough to admit of its nearer approach.

"*Rayther* an unhansom way of quitting the Rising Sun," observed the Jew, who could scarcely suppress his rage at the sight of his intended victim escaping.

"Damned unhansum," echoed Flash.

"Better so than be carried out with my throat cut, ruffians," she added. "There's one secret in the Rising Sun which only my poor lamb and I ever knowed."

"What's that?" demanded the disappointed ruffians.

"The wall of the dark ken is *holler*, and the entrance is from the closet in the inner bar. Don't forget it, Michael," she added, with a laugh, "when you have made a forten at the Sun, and wants *to sell it*. It may be useful, 'specially if the buyer and his cuffin are shown in there."

The two worthies, who saw at once how their scheme had been detected, looked very foolish.

"I bear no malice," continued Bet. "The proof is in the flimsies. You know I could have hanged you. So good-bye, and success to you. But mind how you come near me again—*all George's secrets did not die with him.*"

The next minute the coach rolled off, leaving the respectable Mr. Aaron Wolf and his no less amiable companion rooted with astonishment and confusion to the spot.

"Vell, that is a voman!" exclaimed the Jew, with an involuntary burst of admiration. "If she vasn't a Christian I'd marry her to-morrow; I could make a fortin vith her."

"What's that to do with it?" demanded Flash. "Christian or gipsy, she's flesh and blood."

"Yon're little better than a heathen, Michael; you have no more religion than——"

"You have," interrupted the fellow. "Did I ever know yon refuse a bargain on a Sabbath?"

"Vell, vell, to serve a friend, p'raps; but she's a vonderful voman—a damned knowing voman."

Two or three days saw the widow comfortably settled in her new house in Lambeth. To the astonishment of the neighbours, all the back windows in the course of a day or two were strongly grated, and the front shutters plated with sheet iron and secured with bolts and massive chains; in fact, the cottage was fortified like a lock-up house. To those unacquainted with the mysteries of the place, it seemed as difficult to get out as in. One brace of pistols—*they had been her dear lamb's*—hung over the little parlour chimney-piece, and another by her bed-side; and Bet was one who had courage, if necessary, to use them. The only inmate beside herself and the children was a tall raw-boned woman, who had lived as servant with her for many years at the Rising Sun,—a creature with a thousand vices and slatternly habits, amongst which drunkenness was not the least; but they were redeemed, in her mistress's sight, a thousand times over, by one virtue —*fidelity*. For instance, she would steal liquor of any kind, but might have been trusted with uncounted thousands; would lie to all the world except to Bet; ignorant, as the children of poverty too generally are, she looked upon the profession of a highwayman with a species of veneration, which diminished to simple respect as it descended through the various stages of crime to simple petty larceny; and was much better acquainted with the lives of Turpin, Wild, and Jack Sheppard, than with her Catechism or the Bible. Had she lived to the present day, she would have considered Ainsworth a greater man than the author of the Pentateuch.

But we begin to think that it is time we should introduce more particularly to our readers the two boys, thrown by pride and villany from their legitimate sphere into the arena where childhood loses its innocence in its earliest bud, where crime becomes second nature, and from whence society draws the annual hecatomb which it offers on the altar its own mistaken prejudices have reared.

It is astonishing, in the various schemes for the regeneration of mankind, how perseveringly our modern philanthropists begin at the wrong end. *The primer ought to precede the catechism*, not to follow it.

George, as the deserted grandson of the haughty Sir Walter Mowbray had been called, was a handsome, headstrong boy, about ten years of age. He had the same dark eye which distinguished his unhappy

mother, and much of her firmness of character, which, had it been properly directed, might have produced good, but which the evil example of those around him, neglect, and injudicious punishment, tempered by still more injudicious indulgence, inclined to evil. He was reckless to folly, for one of his tender years, and frequently risked his life by climbing over the roofs of houses, or the lofty trees which grew in the walk, to the terror of his foster-mother and admiration of his young companions. Maybird—poor Ellen's boy, who had been rather poetically named by the widow, for it was the month of May when she received him—was, on the contrary, a quiet gentle child, who would, upon occasion, however, evince courage and determination too. His brother, for so he styled the elder George, loved him with an affection which increased with his years. He might play more frequently with other boys, run away to join them in some expedition to plunder a garden or rifle a nest; but the fruit and eggs, or at least the greatest share of them, were reserved for Maybird, who never seemed so happy as when the runaway returned, and whose tears had frequently saved him from the heavy hand of the widow. With the latter he was the decided favourite, whilst the servant Lizzy preferred the more daring George, who she predicted would one day become a great man upon the road, and live to be immortalised, like Turpin, in history or song.

As George had never informed his wife of the nature of his arrangements with Mr. Prim, and, from his want of education, left no memorandum or clue by which she could find out that worthy's address, the expense of keeping the two boys fell entirely upon her: not that she felt or grumbled at the burden, for she was comparatively rich, and loved them both as well as though they had been her own. She had been an inmate of her cottage about four years, when the continued absence of George, who was sometimes away for two or three days together, seriously alarmed her. She had seen too much of the road of life not to guess that the truant had either fallen or stood upon the brink of one of its declivities, and yet she, with all her knowledge, was helpless. Her only friends were of the class she dreaded; for, despite her opulence, her neighbours carefully shunned her as the widow of the man who had been hanged; indeed, the most respectable had strictly forbidden their children to play with her boys, who had been returned from two schools to which Bet had sent them, at the request of the scholars' parents. Society thought fit, with its usual discriminating justice, to keep the children in ignorance, in order to punish the crimes of the supposed parent.

The old woman was seated in her little parlour by the side of a blazing fire. It was in the month of March, and the wind whistled shrilly round the chimney tops. Maybird was finishing his last slice of toast in the corner, when George, who had deliberately drained the last drop from his cup, set it down, and sauntering from the table, took up his hat to go out. He was at this time fourteen, and Maybird consequently ten.

"Where are you going?" demanded Bet, hastily swallowing her tea.

"Out, mother," said the youth, looking up and smiling in her face.

"You don't stir out of the house to-night," replied the widow. "Lizzy, Lizzy, you hussy, lock the door, and bring me the key."

"I must go, mother; I've promised."

"Ay, to Aaron Wolf, who has trained more boys to the gallows than a bishop has to heaven. Fool!" she added, passionately; "he will lead you from crime to crime—cheat you of your share of the swag after all—and end by selling you to the beaks. I knows his dodges of old."

"He won't sell me; I'm fly."

"You are a fool," answered the old woman.

"Not fool enough to be tied to an apron-string," was the rude reply.

"You'll be hanged, and I shall live to see it."

"Well, you will get over it as you did over your husband's."

At this allusion to the fate of Gipsy George a convulsive movement was perceptible in the features of the widow, who, with all her eccentricity and coarseness, had one spot of natural feeling in her composition—love for the memory of the man who had been the partner of her youth—who had shared with her the proceeds of his crimes; and, ferocious and brutal as he was to others, had ever, as far as his rough disposition would permit, been kind to her.

"George, George," she sobbed, "is it thus you name your father?"

"He was no father of mine," answered the boy; "my father was a gentleman, and Maybird's too."

The widow eyed him curiously for some time, secretly wondering within herself how he could have obtained that information; all at once it suddenly struck her.

"Aaron Wolf told you that lie, I suppose."

"It aint no lie."

"Then if it is not, you must know, young hangdog, that I have supported you through charity, and don't intend to put up with this life much longer."

"You don't?"

"I don't."

"Why then, mother," he still called her so from habit, "good-bye at once—it shall never be said that I was told twice that I ate the bread of charity."

He advanced towards the door; but before he could reach it, Bet, who repented of her hasty word, jumped from her seat, and threw her arms round the struggling boy, whom, despite her temper, she loved; exclaiming in her usual blunt manner:

"Never mind the old woman's temper; if I aint your mother, I love you like one. As for charity, I don't vally a brass farden the expense; if it was twice as much, Bet could stand it."

"That you could, missis," chimed in the servant.

Despite her efforts he released himself, and made towards the door, which Lizzy had purposely delayed to lock, and rushed into the street. The widow shouted after him at the height of her voice:

"Come back, George; you are running to the gallows."

Before her voice died away, the truant was out of sight.

"It's no use," she sighed, as she sank into her comfortably-cushioned chair; "varmint to the backbone."

"He is a regular trump," said Lizzy, who always stood up for her favourite; "we shall hear of him yet. He'll make a name in the world as sure as my name is Liz."

"In the Black Almanack, you mean"—for so her mistress styled the Newgate Calendar; "but he shan't darken the door of my ken again, the ungrateful villain."

Maybird, who had been a quiet spectator of the scene, approached the speaker, and throwing his arms round her ample neck, began pleading for his brother. As he was the widow's darling, he had not long

to plead; for her heart was much better than her temper.

"I know where he is, mother," said the child.

"Where, darlin? In some devil's rookery, I'll be sworn."

"In the great street where the coaches stand by the churches"

"Churches!" repeated the woman.

"He means the Cacklers' Crib," observed Lizzy, by way of explanation; for she saw that her mistress was puzzled, as many of our readers doubtless would be unless we informed them that Cacklers' Crib, in the slang of the day, stood for Westminster Hall.

"And how did yon know it, Maybird?" demanded the woman.

"Bandy Jem came while we were playing in the boats, and told him Aaron Wolf wanted to see him. George promised to go, and you know he should not tell a lie—should he, mother?"

"Not to me," said Bet, "for I have been a mother to him."

"Aint you his mother?" asked the child, fixing his gentle, dove-like eyes upon her.

"Who the devil should be if nurses aint?" replied the servant, who saw that the widow, reckless as she was, hesitated to lie to that simple loving child, in whose yonng nature God seemed to havo planted an innate love of truth and virtue.

"At least you are mine," he added, after a pause. "Aaron Wolf did not tell him that."

"Damn him!" muttered Bet. "They think that I am muzzled; but if I do show my fangs, I'll put the staggers on the best of them."

"Let me go and fetch George," continued the child.

"It's no use, Maybird."

"Oh! he'll come with me. I won't be gone many minutes. I ain't a bit afeard, and know the way."

It was finally settled that the child should be permitted to seek his truant brother.

It was about half-an-hour later the same evening that a man and boy might have been seen standing by the corner of the green enclosure which adjoins St. Margaret's churchyard, Westminster: the man was Aaron Wolf—the boy the widow's runaway charge.

"Vell, as I am an honest man," exclaimed the Jew—it was his constant oath—"but you have no more pluck than a pigeon. How vill you get the monies to find out your noble fader and beautiful moder vith, unless you steal 'em? It's your bounden duty, yon unnatural ruffin."

"But are you sure Bet is not my mother?" demanded the youth.

"No more than I am. I tell you I remember your being brought to their ken a yonngster, at least six months old; and Mike, George's pal, vot had an accident lately vith him, vas sent to vatch the crowner's quest somevhere in Vestminster the day after. I vish I could find it out. There's menies to be made, my dear. I vish I could find it ont."

"Do yon think Bet knows?"

"I'm sure she doesn't," replied the fellow. "George vas a close man, and never trusted to the vomens. There—look there!" he added, in a tone of vexation, pointing at the same time to two gentlemen who had passed them, "Providence holds cherries before your mouth, and you are too lazy to bob for them. That's Snoutt, the banker, going to make a speech in Parliament. They say he is worth a million, and yet he won't treat himself to a hackney-coach."

"Well," said George, resolntely, "I'll do it—I'll do it the next time."

"Vell, you are in luck! Here comes a gentry cove—stag his ticker clink—vot peautiful seals!"

"Shall I draw it?" demanded the boy.

"No; sound the wolls first."

Aaron alluded to the pockets of the gentleman, who was no other than Lord Erringconrt proceeding to the house. He had missed his carriage at Brooks's, and anxious to be heard in an expected debate, had walked with his nephew, Digby, who had just arrived from the Continent, to Westminster. At this period affairs in Paris were beginning to wear an alarming aspect.

"I tell you, nephew," exclaimed tho pompous peer, "that I foresaw it all—all: it is the retribution of Heaven! The army which Louis sent to assist the rebels in America has returned to France, imbued with principles which have spread like a disease. All France has taken the infection, and God knows where the pest may end."

"A mere momentary enthusiasm," said Digby, "which may, however, become dangerous to the peace of Europe, unless the movement be controlled by the few statesmen which France still possesses. That unhappy country at the present moment is like a savage for the first time drunk with the fruit of tho grape; it is scarcely possible to foresee how she will act."

"With hostility to England," said the earl, "happen what will. Nature seems, in one of her capricious moods, to have placed the antagonistic principles in—Bless me, Digby, there's some one at my pocket."

They both turned, and before George could extricate his hand, his collar was securely held by each of the speakers.

"Let me go," exclaimed the boy, "or I'll give you a taste of my knife!"

"The yonng ruffian!" said the earl. "And yet, Digby, you disapprove of the hangman—the first necessity, in my opinion, of a civilised state of society."

"The school-master might be better, my dear uncle; but do not let us discuss the question now What are we to do with our prisoner?"

"Wolf! Wolf!" shonted the boy, "one is an old cove. I'll settle him if yon will tackle the younger."

But the respectable Mr. Aaron Wolf was nowhere to be fonnd. His purpose was answered—he had plunged his victim in the first step of crime, and left him to extricate himself as he could.

"Do with him?" said the earl; "why give him into the hands of justice, to be sure."

"He does seem a hardened boy," added Digby, reluctantly acceding to his uncle's suggestion.

"Let George go—pray don't hurt him!" exclaimed a youthful voice near them.

Digby turned, and beheld the tearful countenance of little Maybird fixed imploringly upon him. He had arrived too late to persuade his brother to return, but time enough to witness his capture and disgrace.

"Let him go?" repeated the peer. "A likely story! Bring tho other as well, Digby," he added; "I'll manage this fellow. We can give them both into custody at the marshal's office."

The benevolent Digby had been struck by the tone and beautiful blue eyes of Maybird; he felt an interest in the child; and thinking it possible that he might belong to respectable parents, and had fallen into bad hands, he relinquished his hold on the collar of George to take the hand of his intercessor. No sooner did the boy feel himself released from the nervous grasp of Digby, than he clenched his fist, and

struck the earl, who was dragging him towards the house, a violent blow in the pit of his stomach, which so astonished his noble captor, that he suddenly released his hold, and the young rascal took to his heels with a loud musical laugh, which told how heartily he enjoyed his escape.

"Why, uncle," said Digby, who had not seen the blow, "you have let him go."

"Let—ugh! oh, the villain! I'll have him hanged—hanged—if it costs me a thousand pounds. Didn't you see him strike me?"

"No. Are you much hurt?"

"I—I—scarcely think that I shall ever breathe freely again; but no matter, you have got the young spawn; he shall serve as a decoy to catch the other. Who is that young villain?" he demanded, turning suddenly to the child.

"George," replied Maybird, clinging involuntarily to the side of Digby.

"And where does he live?"

The child was silent.

"Tell me," continued the peer, "and I'll give you a guinea."

He held up the glittering coin as he spoke; but, young as he was, Maybird was not to be tempted; he knew that George had got himself into difficulties, and he could have suffered himself to have been flogged to death rather than have betrayed him; and yet Maybird was a remarkably tractable, quiet child.

Neither the earl's promises nor threats could tempt the courageous Maybird to utter a word that could complicate his brother George, whom the peer was determined, if possible, to find out and punish. He therefore dragged the child by the hand till he encountered an officer belonging to the house, into whose charge he gave him, promising to appear the following morning at the police-office against him.

"Against such a child, my lord?" exclaimed Digby. "For shame!"

The uncle, however, was resolved, and his eccentric nephew was equally determined, if possible, to protect the infant from his anger. He left the peer at the door of the Lords, and instead of proceeding, as he had intended, to his place in the Commons, he made his way to the office of the magistrate, who was a very different personage from those who administer justice at the present day.

Lolling in an immense easy chair, which was barely

large enough to contain his ample person, Mr. Justice Bumpos was actively engaged in listening to the various night-charges brought before him; and woe to the friendless wretch who could not fee his son-in-law, Lawyer Thicket, to plead for him; right or wrong, he was sure to be committed; while the hardened thief who could grease his partner's palm—for law and justice divided the profits on these occasions—was sure to escape, unless the parties were very persevering, and the case one of a very serious nature.

"Well, Tibbs," exclaimed the worshipful occupier of the great chair to his officer, who entered with little Maybird; "what have you got there?"

"A brat, your *vurchip*, that seed a pocket picked."

"Saw a pocket picked!" exclaimed his superior, who happened to be in a good humour, for the fees had been tumbling in pretty fast; "I don't see, unless he was blind, how he could very well have helped that. Let the varmint go."

"Yes, pray let me go," sobbed Maybird.

"Plea-e your *vurchip*, but I dare not; my Lord Erringcourt gave him in charge, and bade me tell your *vurchip* that he would be here in the morning to *persecute* him. It seems he knows where the thief lives, and won't split."

"Won't he?" roared the magistrate; "we shall see that. Put him at the bar. *Hold him up* if his head is not tall enough to see over it."

It is astonishing how many children's heads, figuratively speaking, are held up at the bar. Such is the inevitable law of nature in the moral training of mankind; neglect engenders crime.

"Now then," said the worshipful Mr. Bumpos, putting on the most terrific of his professional frowns, "tell me, you little desperate villain, what is your name?"

"Maybird," meekly answered the child.

"Maybird! Maybird!" repeated the magistrate; "who ever heard of such a name for a Christian child?—bnt, perhaps," he added, "the little wretch is not a Christian."

"Most likely not, your vurchip."

"Did you see a boy pick a gentleman's pocket?"

"Yes," answered the prisoner meekly.

The magistrate's frown relaxed; he thought that he had frightened him sufficiently for his purpose, for, like all cringing things, he would have run any length to curry favour with the great.

"And what is the young rascal's name?"

Maybird was silent.

"Where does he live?"

Still no answer.

"You won't speak, won't you, young gallows-bird!" roared the incensed justice; "umph! I'll find a way to make you. Tibbs, take him to the gaoler, and direct him to administer five-and-twenty lashes upon—you know where; and then bring him before me again."

"By what authority, and by what law, sir, do you give such an order?" demanded Digby, who had just entered the office and overheard the brutal direction.

"Well!" exclaimed Bumpos, "that beats Newgate! Long as I have sat here, I never heard such an impudent question before. Officers," he added, "secure that fellow. Doubtless he is the padrone of the young prig who escaped. He looks like a highwayman or a returned transport."

"You had better reflect twice before you give such an order," said Digby, coolly; "it might cause you to be removed from that chair, which your brutality towards a child proves you are incapable of filling."

"Incapable! Hell and blazes! have I sat all these years in it to be called incapable!" nttered the incensed justice, scarcely able to articnlate his words. "Why don't you put him in the bar—damn ye!"

The last part of the speech was addressed to Tibbs the officer, to whom, from his constant attendance at Westminster, the person of Digby was familiar. With a hasty stride he approached the magistrate's chair, and began whispering something in his ear. Meanwhile the eccentric but humane speculator in human nature approached the dock, and taking Maybird by the hand, drew him gently from it. He felt disgnsted at seeing innocence within its polluting precincts. The child felt that the hand which removed him was a friendly one, and looking up into the countenance of his protector, thanked him with a look. Children always have an instinctive perception of those who either love or hate them.

"But are you quite sure?" demanded the crest-fallen Bumpos of the official who had enlightened him as to Digby's real character and station.

"Take my oath on it. He once gave me a guinea to let an orange-woman off who had been given in custody for insulting two fine ladies who called her an old wretch."

No sooner was the bustling functionary convinced of the identity of the person whom he had lately ordered to be placed within the bar, than his blnstering tone was promptly changed for one of oily smoothness, and he blandly invited him to take a seat upon the bench beside him; the rest of the officials looked on in speechless astonishment.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," replied Digby, haughtily, for he could be haughty to the mean and worthless. "I am not here to bandy ridiculous compliments, but to demand the freedom of that innocent child—to see him released from the contaminating associations of the lock-up house."

"But he knows the pickpocket," observed the mortified magistrate."

"So do you, I dare say," observed the cynic—"a great many, and much more intimately than he possibly can. I am a witness that he was not present at the attempt upon my uncle's purse, or at least," he added, correcting himself, from his natural love of truth, "that he was not near him."

"Bnt who is to take charge of him?" demanded Bumpos. "The little rascal won't even tell where he lives. He is as obstinate as an old gallows' bird."

"*Gallows' magistrates* make gallows' birds," rejoined Digby. "I have no doubt bnt he will tell me."

A glance passed between the officials and their chief, who began to suspect that the speaker knew something more of Maybird than he was willing to acknowledge, and something was whispered about love-child, Tibbs observing to his superior that the kid and the gentry cove were as like each other as two peas—an observation in which Bumpos joined.

As there was no distinct charge against the prisoner on which he could be detained, and Digby seemed a person not likely to let the matter rest, the child, who with touching confidence still clung to his protector's hand, was dismissed, the obsequious magistrate making a thousand excuses for his error, and assuring the honourable member that his threat of whipping the infant had merely been made to terrify him.

Without deigning a reply, Digby led his *protegée* from the legal den, and calling a coach, desired the man to drive towards Westminster.

"Where are we going?" demanded Maybird.

"Home," was the reply.

"Bnt you don't know where my home is?"

"Yon will tell me."

The little fellow pansed for a few moments, then suddenly throwing his arms round the speaker's neck, answered:

"Yes, if you promise not to hnrt poor George?"

"And who is poor George?"

"Brother George."

His conductor promised, and the child immediately whispered to him the place of his abode.

On reaching Bet's cottage they found the worthy woman in an agony of passionate grief at the absence of her darling, whose capture George had related to her; observing, that as nothing had been taken, and Maybird had no hand in the attempt, he was sure to be liberated.

"Out of my sight, you gallows' villain!" exclaimed the old woman. "I was a fool to let him ventnre ont to seek for such a worthless vagabond!"

"Did he go to look for me?" demanded the astonished boy.

"Who else, hang-dog?"

"Don't cry, mother," exclaimed the reckless, but not heartless, youth. "I'll bring, or rather send, him back. No matter what becomes of me, so Maybird comes home safely. Shake hands with me."

"I will break your neck first," answered the passionate virago.

"Perhaps we shall never meet again," quietly observed the yonth, holding ont his hand.

"No snch lnck, gallows' bird!"

George qnietly took np his cap, which he had thrown upon the table, and left the house, to the great indignation of Lizzy, who declared that her "missns" had a heart "worse nor a stone;" and rushing after her favourite to the door, entreated him vainly to retnrn.

A few moments afterwards Digby and his little charge made their appearance. The former saw with pleasnre the storm of kisses and affectionate endearments with which the old woman received her charge. Bnt when he gazed npon her bloated, vulgar appearance, and contrasted it with the delicate featnres and intellectual, expressive conntenance of the fair child, he mentally asked himself if snch a being could really be its mother.

Bet listened to her darling's acconnt how the great gentleman had taken him away from the beak and bronght him home in a coach, and all the circnmstances attending his captnre and release.

The woman was profnse in her expressions of gratitnde, and declared that the canse of his danger should never darken her threshold again.

"Would you drive him to worse?" demanded her visitor; "depriving him of a heme is not the way to reform him."

"Home or not, the yonng villain never comes here again. If he mnst prig, why didn't he choose the city?—I shonldn't have so mnch minded that; but to disgrace ns here!"

"This is like missus," observed Lizzy; "she don't care a farden what becomes of George, so her favourite is all sqnare."

"Leave the room, hussey!" exclaimed Bet; "can't I and the gentry cove patter, but you mnst thrust your fool's tongue in? Get into the kitchen!"

The enraged servant obeyed; casting, as she left the room, no very favourable looks upon little Maybird and the visitor.

"And is this sweet boy your child?" demanded her visitor, inexpressibly shocked at all he had seen and heard.

"My child!" repeated Bet, taken aback; "who the devil's child do you snppose he is? If I aint his mother, I shonld like to know who is, that's all. I've had the clothing and feeding of him, and he is my boy; ain't you, Maybird?"

"I don't know," said the little fellow, who seemed to have been gifted with an instinctive love of truth; "Aaron Wolf told George that——"

"Hold your tongue!" shrieked the woman, fiercely; "Aaron is a fool; and if he interferes in my consarns any longer, I'll put the stnnners on him."

The terrified child was silenced.

"I feel an interest in his welfare," said Digby, "and will, if yon will permit me, take him entirely under my care. There is my card," he added, at the same time offering his address.

"Take Maybird!" said the woman; "yeu shall take my blood as soon! What should I do in my lonely chair without his smile and prattle to comfort me? Yon had better go, sir," she added, snrlily; "I don't understand coves as calls themselves gentry coming and kidnapping poor people's kids."

"I am willing to pay you any snm as a recompense for the trouble you may have had with him."

"Pay!" repeated Bet, with a loud laugh; "that's like yon gentlefolks. You think onr flesh and blood, heart and limbs, may be had for paying for them; and perhaps, after all, I could connt couters with you I won't sell my darling."

"Consider the advantage to himself."

"I tell you no!" added the widow, ferociously; "I'd sooner wring his neck than lose him."

How mnch further Bet might have proceeded in her oration it is impossible to say, for at this moment Lizzy burst into the room with something between a whine and a howl, crying:

"I knew what it wonld come to, and all along of that pale-faced milksop!"

"What does the critter mean?"

"Why, I mean that George is taken; he has given himself up to save that doll you are always a-whining about; but I'll hire a cackler for him, if you don't."

Bet, who really was attached to both the children, although the youngest, from his gentle disposition and loving nature, was immeasurably her favonrite, burst into a fresh storm of grief and anger at the intelligence, and bitterly reproached herself for having driven him, in her fury, from the house. It seems that the generous boy, on hearing of Maybird's detention, had gone and given himself up to Justice Bumpos in the hope of releasing his brother. Digby was so struck by the conrage and generosity of the act, that he determined to use his influence with his uncle to save him.

"Don't despair, my good woman," he said, kindly; "the prosecntor, Lord Erringconrt, is my near relative; perhaps I may be able to intercede for him."

Bet opened her eyes—it was the first time to her knowledge that she had ever come in contact with the nephew of a lord.

Her visitor took his leave soon after, without making any further attempt te indnce her to resign her charge; he felt for the present that it would be useless.

Despite Digby's entreaties, the Earl of Erringconrt too bitterly resented the blow he had received in the stomach to yield to them, and poor George was fully committed. On his trial, the pompous peer, accom-

panied by his particular friend, Sir Walter Mowbray, took his seat upon the bench; and the youthful culprit, in consideration of the motive which had induced him to deliver himself up, and which was ably urged by the counsel which Digby benevolently employed, was sentenced to only six months' imprisonment; the robbery not having been completed, he was convicted for the assault.

"Dreadful!" exclaimed his lordship, casting a look of indignation upon the prisoner; "he ought to have been transported at the least."

"Or hanged," added the baronet, little dreaming that it was his own grandson of whom he spoke, with as little wisdom as humanity.

It may be as well to state here that when the term of his imprisonment had expired, the youthful offender, who had entered the prison a reckless *boy*, left it a hardened *man*. Six months' association with thieves and burglars destroyed the last trace of timidity, virtue, and sense of shame within his breast; he had become prematurely old, for nothing ages like crime. As he passed the threshold, Aaron Wolf, his tutor and tempter, was waiting to receive him at the gate. Digby, who had intended to provide for him, to give him a chance of retrieving himself, arrived half an hour too late. It was years before George was heard of under that name again.

About a month after the trial, Bet, who had done nothing but reproach herself and drink gin, was seized with a violent inflammation in the lungs, which medical aid—not called in till the disease had mastered all the avenues of life—was too late to baffle. Finding that she was dying, she made up her mind to consign her darling to the care of the only being who, besides herself, had ever shown an interest in his welfare. She sent for Digby, who readily obeyed her summons.

"I am glad you are come," murmured the expiring woman, hoarsely. "While I lived I never could have parted with my pet; but as the croaks are on me, you had better have him—but not till I am dead," she added, convulsively, "not till I am dead. You won't have to wait long, I am half gone already. You'll be kind to him?"

"As a father," replied her visitor, seating himself beside her bed.

"Kinder than his has been, I hope," said the old woman, "or you shouldn't have him."

"What mean you?"

"Do you remember the question you axed me the night you brought him home?"

"Perfectly. I asked if you were his mother," said Digby, who began to feel deeply interested.

"It's no use lying now; I am not his mother."

"And his real parents?" demanded her visitor eagerly.

"I don't know. George was as close as the devil's grip on some of his tacks, and this was one. All he told me was, that he was a bastard, and that his father had given him a sum of money to take care of him."

"The monster! Have you no knowledge of his name?"

"No; but when I undressed the kid I found this locket round his neck. I hid it from George, for something told me it might one day be useful. Here it is."

She reached her hand under the pile of pillows on which she was supported, and drew from it a chain and locket. The latter contained a portrait, which Digby instantly recognised as Fitzgerald. At the back were entwined two locks of hair, one black as the raven's wing, the other a beautiful blond; round them, in small Roman capitals, were the names of Ellen and Gerald.

"You know the man!" exclaimed the dying woman, gazing on his agitated countenance.

"I do," faintly answered her visitor, for he was almost choked by surprise and emotion at the discovery of the supposed heartless cruelty of the man whom he had once esteemed and loved, and who, as he believed, had infamously abandoned the illegitimate offspring of his passions; "would that I had never done so!"

Of course we need not remind our readers that Sedler's story to his wife of Maybird's having been committed to his care by his father, was merely to prevent her inquiring too closely into the connection between him and the rascally lawyer, Mr. Prim.

"You will not split to him?" articulated the woman.

"Not till Maybird is a man."

"Ah, it won't signify then," continued Bet. "And you will teach him to read and write? I never learnt myself, but I dare say it's a good thing. Perhaps, if I had learnt, I might have been a better woman."

"Fear not," said Digby; "he shall be brought up as my son."

"Don't stuff too much learning into his poor head," said Bet; "it might break his spirit, and teach him to forget me. You won't do that—you won't let him forget the old woman who loved him like her own kid, will you?"

She fixed her eyes with a painfully anxious expression upon him as she spoke.

"Maybird is too grateful to do that."

Here the affectionate little fellow clambered upon the bed, and, throwing his arms around her neck, kissed her repeatedly, praying her not to die, and telling her that he would never leave her.

"He loves his old nurse," sobbed the woman. "God never made me the mother of a child, but perhaps I didn't deserve He should; at least, He sent Maybird to console me!"

Not to dwell too long upon a painful scene, the old woman rapidly sank till she breathed her last, murmuring the name of her darling. Just before she died, she drew from her huge pocket a packet, and placed it in Digby's hand. It proved to be her will; in it she left an annuity of fifty pounds a-year to her servant, whose long fidelity well deserved it; a thousand pounds to George; and the rest of her fortune, amounting to no less a sum than ten thousand pounds, besides the cottage, furniture, &c., to Maybird. Digby was named sole executor. The house and furniture he left Lizzy to the enjoyment of, and the rest of the property he suffered to remain in the funds, where Bet had so prudently placed it—secretly resolving that his *protegée* should never touch a penny of it; for he looked upon it as the produce of a life of crime.

That very night he removed Maybird to his own house, much to the astonishment of his servants, who were too much attached to their eccentric master to make any comment except amongst themselves.

Digby was a bachelor, and unattached to any human being. The interest he had felt, from the first moment he beheld his little charge, soon ripened into almost parental love; and he determined, since fortune had thus thrown the helpless being on his care, to educate him according to the plan he had so frequently laid down as the perfection of training for the moral and intellectual formation of youth. Our readers, we dare say, have not forgotten his frequent

disputes and conversations, while at the university, with Fitzgerald on the subject.

Full of this project, he broke up his establishment in London, and started for the Continent with his charge. The first elements of education he imparted to him himself, and as his mind expanded, masters of every science and useful learning were engaged; but all the pupil's studies were made subordinate to the one great view of his guardian, the formation of character. He was encouraged to speak his mind freely upon all occasions, and on all subjects. Punishment was entirely banished from his system, and he treated him from the first like a rational being, not as many theorists do, like a mere machine.

We forgot to add that the name of Maybird was dropped, and that of Harry Burley adopted, as more suited to his present views and station. Burley being one of Digby's family names, he thought he had a right to bestow it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"As the twig is bent, the tree's inclined."

The words of Solomon are alike applicable to the lessons of good and evil: strip them of the garb in which they are dressed, and they merely confirm the opinions which every observer of human nature must have drawn from his experience, that the habits and principles inculcated in youth accompany us through the eventful scenes of our experience.

Fifteen years had elapsed since the bequest of the eccentric Lord Bamff had made Fitzgerald a rich, but not a contented, man. During that period he had exchanged his college living for one of increased value, which brought him more active duties; and in this he vainly endeavoured to forget the sorrows and disappointments of his earlier years. The pleasures which wealth placed within his grasp were rejected, and, like a wilful child, he refused the good he might have enjoyed, because it did not gratify the ruling passion of his nature—ambition. From a lover of society he became a recluse—broke off all intercourse with the few friends he had left—devoted himself to study, and to the political questions of the day, in which he felt a never-ceasing interest. Often would the words of Judge Burton recur to him—"Why not become a bishop?" and he sometimes felt that he had, in a fit of spleen, weakly abandoned the field without a struggle for success.

It was about this period that a circumstance occurred which revived his ever-dominant hope, and recalled him once more to the busy world. Amongst the various means of investing the accumulations of his large income, mortgage was one which his agent recommended; and in the course of years he had, without seeking it, obtained a hold, to an enormous extent, over the estates of the Marquis of Sonrton, an improvident nobleman, whose talents and interest made him indispensable to the ministry. Absorbed in politics, the private affairs of the noble peer were suffered to run to ruin, a state to which they were fast approximating when a circumstance introduced him to the Reverend Gerald Fitzgerald.

The marquis had called upon the agent, through whom the affairs had hitherto been transacted, to request an additional and immediate advance. The man of business demurred, which demur led to an explanation

"You know," urged his lordship, "that the security is ample; added to which, I am ready, if necessary, to insure my life."

The agent still hesitated, regretting that, as he was acting for another, he did not feel that he was authorised to accommodate him.

"Well, then, let me see your principal."

"Impossible, my lord; he is in Devonshire, and never interferes."

"In Devonshire!" exclaimed the peer; "in my own county! Do I know the man? Who is he?"

"The Reverend Mr. Fitzgerald, of Preston Rectory," replied the agent.

And his lordship found, to his astonishment, that he was the debtor of a man whose garden-wall adjoined his own park, and whom he had never thought of sufficient consequence to honour with his notice beyond a passing bow or a good morning; for the marquis, although politically a high churchman, cared not a sixpence, as an individual, for the cloth.

"Fitzgerald!" he exclaimed; "why I know him very well—we are near neighbours. He must be enormously rich."

"One of the wealthiest men in England," replied the agent. "Within the last ten years his estates are trebled in value by an improved system of agriculture and management. His landed property alone amounts to nearly forty thousand a-year; and your lordship," he added, "knows pretty well how considerable his personal property must be."

The peer sighed as he acknowledged to himself its probable extent.

"I cannot understand," he observed, "how this Mr. Fitzgerald, whose family no one ever heard of, should be the possessor of such enormous wealth."

"By bequest, I believe," said the man of business; "at least I heard my uncle, whom I succeeded as his agent, say so. He was appointed by the late Judge Burton, who was Mr. Fitzgerald's intimate friend. But I beg, my lord," he continued, "that you will make no mention of any thing I have said, should you determine on seeing him; for he is rather a strange character, and might possibly take offence."

"Strange — how strange?" demanded the marquis.

"I will tell your lordship an anecdote of him, which I think will give you an insight into his character. I had just concluded the first mortgage on your estate when I received an order from him to bring the deeds to the rectory, together with a pamphlet of Mr. Pitt's, which had just appeared. I started by the mail, taking bills, notes, and securities, to the amount of fifty thousand pounds, with me. Judge of my consternation and terror on my arrival to find that the small trunk in which they were deposited was missing."

"What said your employer?"

"Merely asked if the pamphlet was lost too; and on my producing it, quietly walked with it into his study, without saying a word upon the subject of the money. I immediately started off on horseback, and fortunately found the trunk two stages off, where we had changed horses. On my return to the rectory I found Mr. Fitzgerald quietly reading the last page of the pamphlet."

"He must indeed be an extraordinary character," exclaimed the astonished peer, to whom such indifference appeared little less than insanity. "Tell me—do you often send him political writings?"

"All that appear, my lord."

"Any sermons?"

"Never any sermons, my lord," answered the

agent, with a smile; "perhaps he receives them through some other channel."

The marquis felt his curiosity roused, and he determined to seek an interview with his eccentric neighbour—a resolution which the Easter recess soon gave him leisure to put in execution.

It was about ten days after the above conversation that Fitzgerald, while seated one morning in his library, absorbed in the columns of a newspaper, was roused from his reverie by his servant announcing the Marquis of Sourton. At the very moment he had been reading an account of the death of the Dean of Hereford, and was wondering who would be his fortunate successor. The name of his visitor surprised without embarrassing him. He received the peer with an easy air of high-bred courtesy, which surprised his lordship, who had expected to meet either a churl or a shy recluse.

"It has often struck me, reverend sir," observed the nobleman, "that, considering what near neighbours we are, our intercourse has hitherto been of a very limited character."

"Neither my profession or habits, my lord, leave me opportunity or leisure to court society," replied Fitzgerald, whose pride had at first been rather wounded by the peer's neglect.

"The fault has been mine," resumed his lordship, who felt that he had been deficient in the courtesy usually shown by the aristocracy to the cloth. "My political engagements must plead my excuse. For years I have been entangled in my political duties, to the neglect, not only of my private affairs, but the rights of hospitality and the courtesies of society. You will scarcely credit me," he added, "when I inform you that it was only within these few days I have been made aware of the nature of my obligation to you; in short, that you were the person who holds the several mortgages upon my estates."

"It was without my seeking, I can assure your lordship, that I became so," answered Fitzgerald "My agent has the entire disposal of my investments which are more a source of care than happiness to me, and thus it was that I became your creditor. I trust not an ungenerous one, since I have never even requested to view the property upon which my money is advanced; nor has it ever been made known by me that such mortgages exist."

"My dear sir," hastily exclaimed his visitor, "I have no complaint to offer. In every instance I am the obliged party. It was in consequence of your agent refusing me a further advance upon my estate, the security of which is ample, that I requested to be favoured with the name of his principal, and was surprised to learn that it was yourself. Ah! Mr. Fitzgerald," he added, with a sigh, "you are a happy man; possessed of such immense wealth, and yet blest with philosophy enough to withstand the temptations of the world, and to keep yourself free from its political troubles!"

"I am removed by my profession from all active interference in the affairs of my country," replied his host, with a quiet smile; "yet it does not follow that I am as indifferent as your lordship supposes to the political events of the times; on the contrary, I watch them with a deeper interest than many who take a share in them."

"Indeed!" exclaimed his visitor, with well-affected surprise; "you astonish me. I cannot comprehend why—I beg pardon if the observation is obtrusive—with such views, possessed of fortune and talents, you entered the church, when the office of legislator, which you are so well qualified to fill, would have suited your inclinations better."

"At the time I entered the church the fortune you allude to was, as I and all the world believed, destined for another. A college living of three hundred a-year, which fell to my acceptance as a junior fellow, was too good a thing to be refused. You have my history, my lord."

"Distinguished in your college, too," said the peer, musingly.

"I took the highest honours of my year."

"But why, my dear sir, with such a fortune and such talents, bury yourself in retirement? Even in the church the path to that political distinction you so well merit is open: why not become a bishop? the mitre must be within your reach!"

Fitzgerald smiled at the observation; it was not the first time it had been made to him.

"You are amused," resumed the marquis, "at my observation. Perhaps I am intrusive in this?"

"Not so," replied our hero; "it was at the coincidence. The late Judge Burton, fifteen years since, put the same question to me. But I was enabled to satisfy him that, even if I deserved it, I was unable to attain the honours of the church. Its wealth I require not, for I am too rich already," he added, with a sigh.

"You surprise me," said the marquis. "Nor can I imagine why the honours of the church should be beyond your reach."

"I was opposed in politics to the then ministry," replied Fitzgerald, not willing to enter into further explanation, "and had neither political interest nor friends to recommend me. When the present party came into power, I had retired from the world, and resigned all thoughts of again mingling in its active scenes."

The speaker gave this disingenuous, though not false, account of his motives, not so much with a view of misleading his visitor, as a disinclination to enter into family affairs. The few who had formerly known him as the heir of the Radcliffs had, during his retirement from the world, almost forgotten his existence; and the possibility that the prejudice against his unhappy race might be softened in the royal breast, or his name no longer remembered in connection with it, once more raised his hopes. The visit of the marquis, and the hold which his wealth gave him upon his interest, again caused the mouldering embers of ambition to blaze forth, and the visions of his youth to resume their empire in his breast.

"My dear sir," said the peer, "you must allow me to make amends for past neglect. It is absolutely a sin upon my conscience. Come and dine with me."

The invitation was unhesitatingly accepted, and after a few more brief observations the visitor took his leave.

That evening, for the first time for fifteen years, did Fitzgerald enter society; and such was the power he possessed over himself, that every feeling of novelty and strangeness was repressed, and the hitherto unregarded country clergyman alternately dazzled by his wit and learning, or charmed by the quiet grace and elegance of his manners. The marchioness, a cold heartless woman of the world, was as much pleased as surprised; her daughter, Lady Georgina, a beautiful girl of two-and-twenty, was delighted with him; and Lord Moreland, one of the cabinet ministers, who was staying on a visit with the family, paid marked attention to his views.

The marquis was sufficiently acquainted with human

nature to read that his guest was not indifferent to the prospects he had painted; and on hinting to his friend how much he desired the advancement of Fitzgerald —for so he condescended to term him—that nobleman joined him in recommending our hero to the chancellor for the vacant deanery.

A recommendation from so influential a quarter was not a thing to be refused. His majesty, either forgetful of the name, or his mind already affected by the malady which later in life developed itself, returned the appointment with his signature, without one word of inquiry or comment; and Fitzgerald was duly gazetted as Dean of Hereford.

To all these proceedings our hero was a stranger.

"I have come to say farewell," said the marquis one morning, as he entered the library of the rectory, where he had become a frequent visitor; "but before I quit, you must promise to visit me in town."

"I am not very likely to see the metropolis," replied the new-made dignitary, who as yet dreamt not of his advancement; "but if I should by any unexpected accident be called there, I shall not forget your lordship's invitation."

"Oh, you will be sure to come," said the peer, smilingly; "the distance from your new residence is so short."

"New residence!" repeated Fitzgerald, with surprise

"Yes; the deanery is not more than thirty miles, I believe, from London. Have you not seen the *Gazette?*"

The papers were lying unopened upon the table before Fitzgerald, who had been on the point of examining them when his visitor was announced; an official letter also, with several others, was beside them. With a slightly tremulous hand he broke the seal, and found that it contained his nomination to the vacant deanery. The realisation of the first step in his long-cherished dream of ambition almost unnerved his habitual self-possession, and for a few moments he was silent.

"I trust," said the marquis, piqued by his manner of receiving the news of his elevation, "that the appointment is not unpleasant to you."

"I am too much surprised, my lord, to be eloquent," replied Fitzgerald; "but you shall find that I am not ungrateful; for it is to you, I presume, I am indebted for an advancement which, I confess, is gratifying to my feelings."

"To your own merits, my dear dean," answered the peer.

An imperceptible sneer passed over the lip of his hearer when he remembered how little the merits which the noble speaker extolled had availed him in the affair, for it was plain to his understanding that the appointment was given to the wealthy mortgagee, and not to the scholar and the man. Still, as it advanced the great end of his life, political distinction, he felt little disposition to quarrel with the motive through which it was achieved.

"You had better be in town for the first levee," continued his patron. "I shall be most happy to present you—that is, if you have no more distinguished friend. By-the-bye," he added, "will you continue to hold the rectory with the deanery?"

"I think not, my lord, although I scarcely know in whose favour to resign it; for, as the advowson is mine in perpetuity, I must either appoint or let it lapse to the bishop—a circumstance I by no means contemplate."

"Are you disposed to part with it?" continued his visitor—"it would be extremely disagreeable to have an improper person so near. If so, I am willing to become a purchaser. Indeed, with your present and future prospects in the church," added the peer, significantly, "you would find your holding your present living only a disadvantage to you."

"I am of your opinion, my lord," replied Fitzgerald, who clearly saw that he was expected to make the sacrifice to the cupidity of his patron; "the advowson is at your disposal."

"And the terms?" demanded the marquis.

"Your lordship can easily arrange them with my agent, with whom the papers are deposited."

"Ay—but your agent, my dear dean, is a most unreasonable fellow—invaluable, I grant, to you, but a perfect Cerberus to me. On the subject of the advance upon the estate I found him inexorable, although the securities which you hold are, upon a moderate computation, worth double the sum."

"If your lordship will call upon him on your return to town," said Fitzgerald, significantly, "perhaps you will find him more reasonable."

The peer took the hint, and pressed the subject no further.

The fact was, although his creditor was perfectly willing to make the sacrifice, which it was evident the marquis expected as the price of his interest, still his natural pride and taste revolted from driving the bargain himself. After a few minutes, therefore, of uninteresting conversation, they parted—the noble perfectly satisfied with the very advantageous use he had made of his political influence, and Fitzgerald with the sacrifice with which he had repaid it.

The new dean saw his visitor depart with pleasure. He was impatient to be alone; for in solitude only could he give vent to the feelings which agitated him His unexpected and almost miraculous advancement awoke the passion which had so long slumbered in his heart. But one step more, and a seat in the legislature would be attained. Once possessed of that, he feared not for the rest; once there, what might he not achieve? The restoration of his name and the honours of his race all appeared within his reach, Still he was not happy; the recollection of his early love, and the mysterious disappearance of Ellen and her boy, fell like a gloomy cloud upon the prospect opening to his view.

"Back, rebel thought!" he exclaimed. "If happiness is not within my reach, let me at least enjoy the good that is."

But the rebel thought would not back, and by one of those strong revulsions of feeling which sometimes overtake us in the moment of excitement, he remained for that and several following days overwhelmed with grief and sad reflections on the past, which dimmed the bright anticipations of the future.

The course of the month saw him duly installed in his deanery, from whence, as soon as his affairs permitted, he removed to London to be presented to his majesty, and renew his acquaintance with his patron. The marquis, who had found on his arrival in town the hitherto disagreeable agent one of the most obliging persons in the world, received his guest with many expressions of pleasure, insisting that he should take up his abode at Sourton House, till his own abode could be got ready—a courtesy which Fitzgerald unhesitatingly accepted. Here he renewed his acquaintance with the marchioness and her fair daughter, Lady Georgina Sourton.

The morning of the levee at length arrived, and the new dean, arrayed in full canonicals, for the first time

made his bow to royalty. He was most graciously received, without the slightest suspicion on the part of the king as to the connection between the new dignitary and the attainted family of Derwentwater.

"Fine man—very fine man the dean," said George the Third, half aloud—"looks well in his gown. Where does he come from, Moreland?"

This speech was half to himself, and half to the minister, who was standing near the throne.

"Is he married? hope so! like clergymen to be married; sets a good example, eh?"

"I first met the dean while on a visit to the Marquis of Sourton. For fifteen years he had been rector; he had never for a single day absented himself from his parish, and his benevolence was as discriminating as it was liberal. But I know nothing of his family."

"Good!" said the king, with an air of satisfaction, —"very good! We prefer the resident clergy, my lord—no amateur parsons for me. Never mind his family; a good man fathers himself." And with this aphorism his majesty turned to receive the compliments of the Austrian minister, who had been bowing for the last five minutes before him.

As Fitzgerald was leaving the presence-chamber, accompanied by his noble friend, he encountered his old acquaintance Digby, now by his uncle's death Earl of Erringcourt. He was leaning upon the arm of a young man, apparently about five-and-twenty, with a familiarity which led the dean to suppose it was his son, although he had never heard of his marriage.

"How do you do, Erringcourt?" exclaimed the marquis, extending his hand, "allow me to present my friend the new Dean of Hereford."

It was not till Fitzgerald spoke that Digby, or rather the Earl of Erringcourt, recognised him. Fifteen years of seclusion from the world, together with hard study, had thinned the dark clustering curls upon his brow, and scattered a few white locks there. His canonicals, too, tended to disguise him from his former friend, who seemed for a few moments too much agitated to speak. At last, however, with a violent effort, he recovered his self-possession, and extending his hand, congratulated Fitzgerald on his appointment.

"Permit me," he added, "to present my companion and late ward, Mr. Henry Burley."

They bowed as strangers generally bow when introduced.

"The gentleman whose speech I lately read on the subsidy question?" asked Fitzgerald.

"The same."

"I was much struck by its frankness and the total absence of those conventional shields under which young statesmen generally veil their real opinions. You are young, sir," he added, addressing Mr. Burley, "and have a grand career before you."

"I care not for the pride of the career," replied the young member, "so that the end be useful. That's my aim."

The high-bred dean seemed surprised at the bluntness of the reply.

"You must not wonder at his manner," said the earl. "Burley has been educated under my system—the system which you once so forcibly characterised as Utopian; and the result," he continued, proudly, "has not disappointed my expectations. He is worthy all that even a father's heart could wish him, and will, I doubt not, remain so; for I am not yet reclaimed from my opinion on the power and influence of education. Indeed," he added, significantly, glancing at the dean as he spoke, "all that I hear and see in the world convinces me that I am right. Time, however, will decide."

Fitzgerald felt the allusion and remained silent, not quite pleased either at the manner in which it was conveyed or the coolness with which his former friend received him.

"Come," said the marquis, "such old friends must not part so soon. You will dine with us, Erringcourt?"

His lordship pleaded indisposition, and excused himself.

"Burley, at least, will not refuse the occasion to pay his respects to the ladies," observed the noble inviter with a smile, which was meant to conceal the mortification he felt at Erringcourt's refusal.

"With pleasure," exclaimed the young man, his eyes sparkling with joy. "That is, if—" Here the speaker looked hesitatingly at his guardian and companion.

"Go, by all means, my dear boy," said Erringcourt "My indisposition must not prevent your availing yourself of our friend's hospitality. I have a long arrear of correspondence to get through, and shall dine in my own room."

The gentlemen bowed and parted; Fitzgerald secretly displeased at the cool reception given him by his quondam friend.

"Have you known Erringcourt long?" demanded the marquis, as he descended the grand staircase of St. James's Palace on their way to the carriage.

"About twenty years," was the reply.

"Intimately?" added the noble speaker.

"Intimately."

"Do not deem me curious, my dear dean," continued Sourton; "but I thought—of course it must have been imagination—that there was an air of restraint on both sides."

"Nothing could have been plainer," said the churchman; "there was an air of restraint. Digby, or Erringcourt, as I now must call him, once professed himself my friend—nay, I believe was so. We disagreed on one of his Utopian views of human character, which, while he discussed them, were only amusing; applied, they became offensive: and for fifteen years we have neither corresponded nor met. I had almost forgotten the affair myself, but his constrained manner shows that he still resents it."

"No matter, he has no influence with the ministry."

"And if he had, my lord," replied Fitzgerald, "it would be equally a matter of indifference. But who was that gentleman whom he introduced to me as his friend and late ward?"

"There I am as much in the dark as yourself," said the marquis. "Some say he is a nephew or cousin; others whisper that there is a nearer tie between them. One thing is certain, that he loves him like a son; and as he is a bachelor, it is supposed he will leave his vast fortune to him."

"His features," observed the dean, with an involuntary sigh, "remind me of one whom I—I must have seen somewhere before. Does he sit for one of his lordship's boroughs?"

"Yes; and his election was one of the most whimsical things in the world."

"How so?" demanded Fitzgerald, his curiosity, he knew not why, suddenly interested in all that could illustrate the character of Mr. Burley.

"His opponent on the hustings accused him of having compelled the tenants of Lord Erringcourt to

vote in his favour, by threatening to dismiss them from their farms—an accusation which Burley indignantly denied. The agent of the earl, who was upon the hustings, had, it seems, in the excess of his zeal, abused his position, and made the threat alluded to; upon which the youthful candidate addressed the electors, and assured them that their landland would scorn to influence their votes by such a menace."

"I wonder the declaration did not lose his election."

"On the contrary," replied the marquis, "it secured it. The freeholders were so struck with the openness of his conduct, that many of them who would have opposed him, merely to show their independence, carried him triumphantly through the contest. He has since distinguished himself as a shrewd debater. Poor Lord Sappy, whose style, it must be confessed, is rather obscure, got roughly handled by him."

"I feel," thought Fitzgerald, as they rode home, "that I shall dislike that young man."

The dinner party consisted of the marquis and his family, Lady Heartley, Miss Fortescue (a cousin of Lady Georgina's), the dean, and two or three old dowagers, ever ready to amuse themselves by scandal, match-making, or mischief, whichever fell in their way. Fortunately for Fitzgerald's plans, Lady Heartley had entirely forgotten the circumstances under which he had formerly been introduced to her, and merely retained a confused recollection of his name.

At dinner, the churchman observed that Burley's attentions were devoted to Lady Georgina, and received by her with that timid delight which speaks of love returned. This annoyed him; for, strange to say, the beauty and unaffected simplicity of her character had made an impression on him; in addition to which, he felt that she was necessary to him in furthering his ambition; nor did he doubt for an instant that his wealth would have great weight with the father, even if a matter of indifference to his daughter. The many years which had elapsed since the mysterious disappearance of Ellen, and the fact that the witnesses of his marriage were dead, and both the certificates in his possession, made his mind perfectly easy on that score. True he sometimes sighed at the recollection of his son.

"Do you leave us so soon?" demanded the marquis, as Burley rose to follow the ladies into the drawing-room. "At your age fly the bottle! I blush for you!"

"Thank you, marquis; I am not a votary of Bacchus. To me the habit of drinking to excess is disgusting, and I would it were put down by act of Parliament. What can be more revolting to decency than a man stultifying himself with wine, and then entering the society of ladies? And yet men who style themselves gentlemen practise it."

"But does it follow that a man must stultify himself because he sits for an hour or two after dinner?" demanded the dean, who was willing, if possible, to detain him from Georgina. "Do you make no distinction between the rational enjoyment of the gifts of Providence and their abuse? Yours is a strange philosophy."

"Few know when to stop," said Burley. "The custom, I contend, is a bad one; and I, for one, am determined never willingly to sanction it."

"A young statesman," observed Fitzgerald, sarcastically, for he liked not the dogmatic style of the speaker, "is a Diogenes when in his tub."

"And a clergyman," retorted the young man, with more temper than politeness, "when the tub is in him. I am neither to be argued nor sneered out of a resolution which I know to be right."

With these words he quitted the room to join the ladies.

Fitzgerald felt the retort, but was too politic to resent it: although his long absence from the world had not blunted the keen spirit of satire which he possessed, prudence had tempered the use of it; added to which, he felt that a contest of wits with one so much his junior would neither be dignified in one of his years nor in character with his profession, the outward proprieties of which he most scrupulously observed on all occasions, and, let us add, many of its charities and virtues.

"That was a keen bit, dean," observed the marquis, as the door closed upon Burley; "I told you that he was singular in his opinions, and sometimes rude in expressing them."

"It fell hurtless, my lord," replied Fitzgerald, with dignified composure. "Of all the follies which, in common with my fellow-creatures, I may have been guilty of, excess is the last I have to reproach myself with. I do not remember, even in my college days, to have exceeded a pint of wine—intoxicated I am sure I never was—so that the retort which perhaps I provoked from Mr. Burley falls pointless. But let it pass—I shall think of it no more."

"It was rude," observed the marquis.

"He is a fortunate young man," observed the dean.

"Yes," said the marquis, "he may be considered fortunate in many respects. But do you allude to his fortune, talents, or disposition?"

"To neither," replied Fitzgerald, "but to that which is above them all, in having secured the affections of your accomplished daughter. Lady Georgina is indeed a being to make any man happy."

"Umph!" ejaculated his lordship, "perhaps he is not so fortunate as you imagine. 'Tis true I have observed something like a flirtation between them, but not a word has been said to me on the subject. Indeed," he added, for the words of his wealthy creditor had given him subject for reflection, "I am not altogether certain that I should approve, for although Georgina will have scarcely any fortune, I do not altogether like the fellow; yet if Erringcourt leaves him his estates, I don't know whether, in prudence, I ought to refuse him."

"Fortune with the suitor of Lady Georgina, I should conceive, would never be an object; her beauty and amiability will be sufficient dower."

This was the very opening the marquis wished for, and had even been expecting; but he was too old a tactician to show his feelings; he therefore answered him with well-affected surprise:

"This from a confirmed bachelor! If such are your ideas, I wonder you have never proposed to some fair lady or another. Few," he added, after a pause, which was intended as an encouragement, "I should imagine, would refuse you."

"Your own daughter, Lady Georgina, for instance, my lord."

"Would be honoured by such an alliance?" exclaimed the delighted peer.

"She may think differently, my lord," continued Fitzgerald, doubtingly; "my years and person——"

"Might satisfy any reasonable woman," interrupted his host, whose anxiety for the match now equalled the dean's; for he saw at once the advantage which might be derived from such a connection. "As for this trifling with Burley, believe me, it is nothing; but for your satisfaction he shall be received here no more. His rudeness to-day has given me a fair excuse."

"Not on my account, my lord."

"On your account," added the peer, with marked emphasis; "since I am, I presume, from this day forth to consider you as a suitor for my daughter's hand."

"Favoured by your approbation and encouragement, marquis, I should be unworthy of that honour did I hesitate to declare myself. Nor do I invite Lady Georgina," he added, proudly, "to share an undistinguished name. My family is noble, although unfortunate, since I am the last and sole representative of the house of Derwentwater."

The peer was agreeably surprised to find that the alliance would be so equal in point of birth, although he felt some political scruples, well knowing that his own politics and those of his family had ever been opposed to the cause in which the house of Radcliff fell.

"And are you," he said, after a pause, "as rank a Jacobite as your ancestors?"

"No, my lord," replied Fitzgerald, smiling—"we have lost too much for that. My views—for longer concealment would be useless and ungenerous between us—are, if possible, to re-establish my name and the forfeit honours of my fathers. Their wealth I regret not. Let the jackals keep their prey—I am more than sufficiently rich already."

"It will be difficult," replied the marquis, musingly, "but not impossible. Could you but once be introduced into the legislature, your talents might achieve it. But that plan is impossible," he added. "As a clergyman, you are debarred."

"From the Commons, certainly," replied the dean, "but not the Lords. As a bishop I might obtain the same influence with government as in the lower house. I have talents not untried, and energies not yet destroyed by time and disappointment."

"Of course," said his lordship, who began to see his way more clearly, "once united to my family, your interests would become mine; and I think few ministers would venture to refuse me. I have three boroughs, besides my vote in the upper house. But could you not contrive to do something to give a colour to the demand—build a school? Not that I

approve of educating the people too much—it teaches them to think; and thinking men are dangerous. Repair your cathedral, which your predecessor, I hear, has left almost a ruin,—something on which to found a claim; for the king is most scrupulous in all the higher appointments of the church. The wretched opposition, too, are beginning to get troublesome Your elevation would be noticed."

"No matter, so it is obtained," replied the churchman, coolly; "the prerogative of the crown will always find defenders. Once on the bench, we can smile at the opposition."

"Naturally—naturally," replied the statesman, with a smile; "at least there is *one* advantage in an opposition."

"And what is that *one* advantage, my lord?" demanded Fitzgerald.

"It teaches ministers the value of those who enable them to defeat it."

Coffee being announced, the conversation was broken off, and the speakers adjourned to the drawing-room, but not before it was finally settled that the dean was from that day forth the avowed suitor of Lady Georgina, and accepted as such by her family.

"I think," said the marquis, addressing the two elder ladies, "it is as well that we have come to relieve you; for Mr. Burley, with all his gallantry, has left you, I perceive, to your own resources."

"Which have been very well employed," exclaimed Miss Fortescue, holding up her cards in a game of piquet.

Burley coloured at the insinuation, which he felt was just. Lady Heartley, whose propensity for annoying people had by no means decreased with age, added to his embarrassment by her observation.

"Oh, yes," she observed, with a look which seemed to convey that she had long since made the discovery; "whenever Mr. Burley is in the presence of Georgina he is polite to forget that there is any other person present. Don't blush, my dear," she added, turning to her niece, whose face crimsoned at the remark; "you know I have only spoken truth."

The marquis, looking scarcely less annoyed than his daughter, said: "Come, Georgina, I have engaged you for a game of chess with the dean; I told him how frequently you had beaten me, and as he is rather sceptical as to a lady's skill, I have determined to convince him; so play your best."

The young lady, happy to escape further observation, and avoid the attentions of her lover, which were sure to call forth the malicious remarks of her aunt, complied cheerfully with her father's request, and took a seat at the table opposite Fitzgerald.

Burley drew a chair beside them, much to the dissatisfaction of the politic father, and watched the progress of the game.

"You are rash, Lady Georgina," he exclaimed, after a few moves had been made; "the dean will take the pawn."

"Yes—thank you," replied the young lady, confusedly, at the same time replacing the piece on the square from which she had raised it. "I fear," she added, addressing her opponent, "you will lose all patience with me, I am such a careless player. Will you permit me to recall the move?"

"Certainly," replied the dean; "a move at chess is not like a move in life—a thing beyond retracting. Would that the latter could be as easily remedied as the former!"

For nearly half an hour the game proceeded in silence. Burley at last indicated a move to his fair mistress with his finger, which, if not met by a corresponding check, would have proved highly disadvantageous to Fitzgerald, and lost him the game. He remembered it well, however, it having been one of Digby's favourite moves, and which he had frequently defeated during the period of their friendship while at Cambridge.

"You play well, sir," said Burley, with an air of vexation, as soon as he saw the check so cleverly given; "doubtless you have had much practice?"

"On the contrary," replied the dean, with a smile, "this is the first time I have played for nearly twenty years. My last antagonist at chess was the present Earl of Erringcourt. I could almost have imagined Lady Georgina's moves to have been directed by him, so well do I remember his play."

"You must have been intimate with his lordship," said the young man, with an air of surprise; "and yet I am positive I never once heard him mention your name."

"Possibly not," replied Fitzgerald, coolly; "our paths in life were different, and the friendships of youth are soon forgotten."

"You wrong Lord Erringcourt," exclaimed Burley, with more animation than discretion. "Lord Erringcourt is incapable of forgetting a friend."

"You mistake me, sir," replied the dean, haughtily, but calmly; "my observations were of a general character. I certainly never meant to accuse his lordship of a neglect which I never felt, or of a coldness to which I am profoundly indifferent."

"And yet the very sentiment," continued Burley, whose evil genius seemed to urge him on, "contains a sentiment of pique, if not of resentment. I can read it in your mind."

The marquis looked excessively angry, and poor Georgina could almost have cried with vexation at the want of tact on the part of her lover in thus prolonging a conversation so distasteful.

"And has his speculative lordship," demanded Fitzgerald, whose perfect command of temper and gentlemanly bearing gave him an immeasurable advantage over the young man, "taught you to analyse ideas which are unspoken by the test of those which are? The pupil is no doubt, worthy of such a philosophical instructor. You will be worthy," he added, with a well-bred smile, "to govern the Utopian world *when* your guardian has created it."

"More than some who wear the garb of religion," was the blunt retort.

"Fie! Burley," exclaimed Lady Georgina, almost bursting into tears.

Her cousin, Miss Fortescue, threw down her cards, and came and stood beside her.

"Do not be annoyed on my account, young lady," replied the dean, with forced but polished calmness; "the rude petulance of a boy cannot move me. It were folly to resent where the nature of my profession does not permit me to correct."

Burley's countenance crimsoned at the words. Although no professed duellist, and even an enemy to the false principles of honour upon which it is based, for a moment he experienced so powerful a dislike to the impassable personage who had treated him so contemptuously, that he wished the sacred character of a clergyman had not prevented his demanding satisfaction on the spot.

"Lady Georgina," he exclaimed, "I must leave you to the skill of your antagonist; I dare no longer trust my temper with a man who, under the garb of his profession, can insult with impunity."

Bowing to the rest of the party, the angry snitor, without casting a second glance at Fitzgerald, withdrew.

"I am glad the fellow is gone!" exclaimed the marquis, as soon as Burley left the room, and, indeed, almost before he could have been out of hearing. "Marchioness, remember that we are never again at home to that rude person. He has not only insnlted my guest, bnt myself."

Lady Georgina heard the resolution with a sigh, and wondered how Bnrley could have been so imprudent as to offend her father; nor was she satisfied with his behaviour towards the dean, whose qniet manners had rendered him a favonrite with her.

"Don't sigh, Georgey," whispered her cousin; "papa will relent, and Burley make his excuses."

The marquis soon afterwards adjourned to the House of Lords, in time to vote on a qnestion in which the ministry felt deeply interested. Leaving Fitzgerald to entertain the ladies—a task which he exerted himself so well to execute that both the marchioness and Lady Heartley were charmed with his wit and conversation; and even Lady Georgina could not help whispering to her cousin that he was one of the cleverest men she had ever conversed with.

CHAPTER XIX.

Hate is a fearful passion when it spring
'Twixt friends or kindred blood.

"WELL," exclaimed the Earl of Erringcourt, the following morning, to his *protegée*, as they were seated at breakfast, "you spent the evening at the Marquis of Sonrton's. What think you of his gnest, the new dean?"

"The most disagreeable fellow I ever encountered," said the yonng man. "We nearly quarrelled; and at last he so provoked me by his observations, that I believe—yes, I am sure—I was almost rnde to him."

"I am very sorry to hesr it, Burley," replied his lordship, gravely. "Mr. Fitzgerald's manners must be much changed to warrant any deviation from the laws of politeness to him. Formerly he was one of the most gentlemanly men I ever had the plaasure of being acquainted with——"

"Oh! he is gentlemanly enough," impatiently interrupted the young man; "too gentlemanly. He annoyed me, when I wished to follow the ladies into the drawing-room, by pressing me to remain; and when I hinted to him that excess was displeasing to me, and unbecoming of him, he threw into my teeth something about 'Diogenes and his tnb.' He spoke of his former intimacy with you, too, in a manner which irritated me, implying coldness on your part and nndeserved neglect. And so, to orevent a quarrel, I left the honse."

"It was no slander," observed the earl.

"How?"

"To him my condnct mnst seem cold, capricious, and ungenerous, for he has had no means of ever jndging my motives."

"But why not explain what those motives were?" demanded Burley. "I am snre that they were just."

"Impossible!" said his guardian — "they cannot be explained — at least," he added, "not for the present."

"There can be no difficulty if they are just ones," urged the young man; "and I cannot suppose them, for an instant, otherwise."

"'Tis difficnlt to judge them rightly; but whatever my motives, they are mine alone. Our first coolness arose from a misconception of his character, in which I was most decidedly in error, and yon could not have hnrt or displeased me more than by disrespectful treatment of Mr. Fitzgerald. He is both a scholar and a gentleman. During the many years of our intimacy I never knew him guilty of an act which swerved from the path of honour—never but once—and that the world would have treated lightly, although you and old-fashioned moralists like myself would have condemned him. Cultivate his acquaintance. I wish you to exercise every proper means to obtain his good will; he may prove a valuable friend to you."

"Never!" exclaimed the yonth, emphatically, "if he has proved a false one to you; for unless he had, I am convinced you would not have broken so completely with him."

"Mnst I repeat it," said the earl, "that in onr disagreement, the error, the folly was entirely on my side, and that against friendship he has nothing to answer for? I suspected—wrongfully suspected—him of meanness, in truckling to the ruling passion of his existence. His life has given the lie to my suspicion."

"Althongh it may be trne, my dear guardian, you were in the wrong—a thing which I neither can nor will believe—why do you wish me to conciliate this sarcastic churchman? I am certain that he dislikes me, and equally so that the feeling is mutnsl. We shall be mnch better friends at a distance. There is an affinity of hate, I am sure, between us."

"God forbid!" exclaimed the earl, starting from his chair and pacing the room in violent agitation. "I know of nothing which would give so deep a wound to my heart as to find that snch a feeling was mutnal between you. Struggle with it—conquer it, my dear boy. I ask it as the reward of fifteen years of anxious love and watchful care. Will you disappoint me?" he added, laying his hand npon the young man's shoulder, the tears glistening in his eyes as he addressed him.

Burley felt that his guardian's hand trembled, and although wondering at the cause, promised most carefully to abstain from all cause of offence against Mr. Fitzgerald, and, if possible, cultivate his good opinion which latter he secretly thought there was not much chance of his obtaining.

"I knew yon would not disappoint me," said the earl, kindly; "and you shall find that I am not neglectful of yonr wishes. I saw Lady Georgina at the drawing-room; she is, indeed, a lovely girl. I will wait npon the marquis in a few days."

"My kind gnardian, what do I not owe yon?" exclaimed the young man, casting on him a look of intense gratitude. "Bnt there must be no deception," he added; "her father mnst know all."

"All," repeated Lord Erringcourt, seriously.

"That I am the object of your bounty, the child perhaps of sin and shame, rescued by your hnmanity from the career of crime to which I had from infancy been destined."

"Fear not," said his guardian, willing to change the conversation, for the snbject was a painful one, "but I shall act towards Sourton in this matter with honour as well as prudence. I have reasons to offer which will weigh, I am sure, with the noble marquis."

His ward would once more have loaded him with

expressions of gratitude, had not he stopped his eloquence.

"Nothing," he said—"you absolutely owe me nothing, Burley. I am more than repaid in the virtues and talents which have rewarded my care; and if, as I believe, your happiness depends upon an union with the fair Georgina, I shall be happy, by any sacrifice of present wealth, to promote it. Perhaps," he added, with a smile, "this converted enemy, the dean, may be induced to pronounce the nuptial benediction. He seems in favour with the marquis."

"He seeks him, most probably, as a stepping-stone to his ambition," replied the young man, "for I have an idea the churchman has no inconsiderable share of that weakest of all human passions. I can read it in the curl of his proud lip—in the expression of his arched brow. Why else should he seek the friendship of the Marquis of Sourton?"

"Again you are in error," said the earl. "Fitzgerald is a rare example of the strength of mind which will enable a man to eradicate the sentiments implanted in the heart in childhood; for he was educated for the political world—ambition was his earliest lesson; it was instilled into him till it became his dream by night, his thought by day; and yet, rather than accept a dependent position upon a party which he had served with his pen, and which, upon its accession to power, trifled with him, he accepted a college living of three hundred a year, and by that act debarred himself from a seat in the legislature, where his eloquence, learning, and genius, might have made him the leader of no weak party."

"You surprise—nay, more, you interest me. Pray proceed."

"Nor was this the only sacrifice; he had previously lost, by his independent spirit, a large fortune, which, although trivial in comparison with the princely possessions of his family—for Mr. Fitzgerald springs from no ignoble race—would have raised him to opulence."

"Such a man must possess no common mind," said Burley.

"As a further proof," continued Erringcourt, "when he was in poverty he rejected my assistance, not from pride, but principle; and when, by the kindness of a comparative stranger, he became rich—for he is at this moment one of the wealthiest commoners in England—he remained contented with his village church, and sought no interest in the world beyond."

"Yet he has accepted the deanery of Hereford," urged the young man, unwilling to be quite convinced that the man who had offended him was a person to be respected instead of disliked.

"There I confess," resumed the earl, "like you, I was for a moment doubtful whether the old leaven was not at work within him; but the lord chancellor, whom I questioned upon the subject, assured me that the appointment was made without even the knowledge of Fitzgerald, who received the first information of it from the *Gazette*. The character of Lord Moreland, who met him by accident in the country, and who recommended him for promotion, is too high to be tainted even by the suspicion of an unworthy motive."

"Well, I certainly feel more inclined to conciliate him than before," said the young man; "for there is at least a spirit of disinterestedness in him which pleases me, and distinguishes him from the commonplace beings of this world. Certainly, from the simplicity of his dress, and in some degree from his manner, I should not have taken him to be rich. Is he married?"

"I never heard of his having been," replied the earl.

"Then who will be his heir?—who will inherit his wealth?"

"For his wealth I cannot name an inheritor, and probably at this moment Mr. Fitzgerald himself would be much puzzled to do so; he is understood to be the last of his family—so that you," added Lord Erringcourt, with a peculiar smile, "may come in for a share, if you are wise, and cultivate his good graces. I have known more improbable things take place."

"Now you jest," said Burley, laughing; "if I thought you were serious I would declare war against the dean, were it only to show my independence. Adieu, my lord," he added; "I am for the marquis's, where, with a face as happy as a whipped child's, I will make the *amende honorable* to the very reverend dean. I only pray that Lady Georgina may not be there to laugh at me."

"Rather pray that she may witness your good sense. If she is worthy of your love she will not think the less of you for acknowledging yourself in error. Adieu, and remember that our conversation is strictly private."

The earl continued to pace the apartment for some time after the departure of Burley, whom he loved as a son, and the development of whose character had been his study for fifteen years.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "I have conquered my prejudice, and done Fitzgerald justice. Reason tells me to acquit him of being the slave of ambition, and yet at times, despite its evidence, the thought returns upon me with more than its original force. I know the strength of education and early principles—the moral, the almost physical difficulty of eradicating first impressions. If my judgment proves correct—if my former friend has really done so, he has achieved a victory sufficient to atone for his one crime—the desertion of his offspring; and I will reward him with a treasure he dreams not of; although to part with Burley will strike a fatal blow to my happiness. 'Tis strange," he added, musingly, "that the boy should have entertained the same suspicion; he has penetration and judgment beyond his years. He may be right; time will show—time will show."

With this reflection, his lordship endeavoured to dismiss the subject from his mind, and proceeded to dress for a committee of the house.

Burley's visit to the Marquis of Sourton was one from which he did not expect much pleasure; but less did he anticipate the reply he met with, of "Not at home," which the porter gave in answer to his inquiries of the ladies. He would have believed it a truth on the servant's part, had he not caught a glimpse of Georgina at the window as he rode away. Without knowing why, his indignation was excited against the dean, at whose suggestion he fancied himself excluded, and he determined to have some explanation with the lady before he permitted his guardian to make proposals to the marquis; for which purpose he went to an evening party, where he was sure to meet her. Again he was displeased. She was leaning upon Fitzgerald's arm, evidently pleased with his fascinating conversation, if not with his attentions. With a feeling both of anger and jealousy he left the party without addressing her.

"All Lord Erringcourt's arguments in favour of

that man will be useless," he fretfully exclaimed, as he threw himself back in his carriage; "I feel that I was born to hate him."

CHAPTER XX.

Slave of his passions, yet a heart withal
Not deaf to virtue; like life's tangled web,
Mixed up with good and bad.

Not knowing where or how to employ the time, and his heart being ill at ease, our hero drove to Ranelagh—at the period of which we write a place of fashionable resort, though classed with the reminiscences of our grandmothers and their juvenile days. The gardens were thronged, although the concert was nearly over. Many of his acquaintances—men whom he had met in the fashionable world—mere butterflies of fortune—rejoiced to see him in that vortex of dissipation, where all ranks were confounded, where the duchess jostled against the courtesan, the highwayman with the legislator; where coy morality threw aside her last veil, and abandoned herself too frequently to the embrace of vice.

"What!" exclaimed one, "the cynic out of his tub!"

"The philosopher of twenty in search of an honest man!" exclaimed Captain Sedley, one of the most celebrated men of fashion of the day; "where is your lantern, Burley?"

"Say rather for an honest woman," added a tall, dark, handsome man, who appeared to be about thirty; "the more difficult, I guess, to find of the two."

"No man knows that better than yourself," exclaimed Sir Harry Waller. "Experience teaches."

The captain introduced the baronet and his companion to Burley. Sir Harry was known by reputation as one of the most finished rakes about town; the latter, a Colonel Hamilton, he had neither seen nor heard of before. At any other moment, perhaps, he would have declined joining their boisterous party, for although Sedley and Waller were known to be men of fortune, and what the world terms honour, they were not the associates he would have chosen; but his heart was ill at ease; he felt dissatisfied with Georgina, himself, and all the world; and he yielded to any proposal which promised him oblivion. Something, too, particularly attracted his attention in the person of the colonel; he felt like a man who gazes on a finished portrait, which he had not seen since it was sketched. He was puzzled. That they had met before he felt assured, but when or where he had not the slightest recollection.

"Do not think me rude," he exclaimed, seeing that the colonel appeared slightly embarrassed by his scrutiny; "but we have met before, and I was endeavouring to remember where; perhaps your memory can assist me."

"Unfortunately not," replied the stranger, with a graceful bow. "I have been absent from England for many years, and both lost sight of and been forgotten by many of my friends."

"You have served, then?"

"*I have served.*"

"In England?" continued Burley.

"No, in France."

"It must have been there or else in Germany that we met then," resumed our hero, who felt annoyed at his own want of memory; "since I have passed the greater portion of my life in those two countries, and but lately returned to England."

"No matter where you met, or whether you ever meet again," exclaimed Sedley, as he passed round the champagne; "you are both of you dev'lish good fellows, and that's all we need care about. Perhaps," he added, "you were schoolfellows."

"Certainly not schoolfellows," said Burley, with a sigh, for he remembered the only school in England at which he had ever been, and which our readers will recollect he and George had both been hunted from, as the children of the man who had been hanged.

"Or met in childhood," added Sir Harry.

Hamilton's brow became suddenly overcast, as he quietly observed that he felt convinced they never could have met in childhood. He had a peculiar recollection of names, and certainly could not have forgotten that of Burley.

The approach of a stout lady, vulgarly but magnificently dressed, who was attended by a bevy of beaux, and had two or three female companions with her, changed the conversation. As she passed the spot where the party was seated, she nodded familiarly to the baronet and Sedley.

"There goes the Duchess of Gordon," exclaimed Sedley; "the sharpest tongue and the keenest wit of any woman in England."

"And the greatest matchmaker," added Sir Harry Waller. "She has netted two dukes for her girls already. What do you think of her, Hamilton?"

"That she wears prodigious fine diamonds," replied the colonel; "worth two thousand pounds at least."

Burley stared, for he thought it a strange remark.

A loud laugh and a sort of cheer announced the approach of a party who had been indulging freely in their libations to the rosy god, and presently a dozen gentlemen came rolling, or rather dancing, down the walk. The leader of the joyous band was a tall handsome man, in the very prime of life, slightly inclined to obesity, but not enough to hide the muscular proportions of his graceful figure. His chestnut hair was slightly powdered, and he wore the well known coat of the Jockey Club; a small star, half hid under its broad lappel, indicated the wearer's rank. It was no other than the frolic-loving Prince of Wales, who had made a wager with his companions that he would kiss every woman he met in the walk.

"Go it, George!" exclaimed a stout, coarse, pimple-nosed, half-drunken debauchee, who followed him; "there is nothing like completing a thing when you have commenced it."

The speaker was no other than the infamous Duke of Orleans, the father of Louis Philippe, who had been sent by Louis XVI. on a mission to England, in order to remove him for awhile from France, where, by his intrigues against his authority, and cowardly, unmanly slanders against the queen, Marie Antoinette, he had materially contributed to the impending revolution. Although married to a good and virtuous woman, the only daughter to the Duc de Penthievre, from whom he had received a princely dower, his infidelities were as numerous as they were degrading; he even numbered the instructress of his children, the celebrated Madame de Genlis, amongst his mistresses, and insulted his wife by retaining her under the same roof. Although possessed of an immense fortune, it was insufficient for the horrible debaucheries in which he indulged, and which would pollute the pen of an honourable writer to trace. To supply his extravagance, he introduced his brother-in-law, the young Prince de Lamballe, to one of his fearful orgies; and, when drunk, caused him to be placed in the same bed

with a female whom he knew to be dying of a disorder that was incurable. The device succeeded, and in right of his wife he became the sole heir of the family estates. It is said that he afterwards procured the massacre of his victim's widow, the lovely Princess de Lamballe, to secure her jointure, which was large, as she was related to the reigning house of Savoy. Foreseeing, perhaps, that a time might come when a refuge in England would be necessary, he sought, by every means, to ingratiate himself with the heir-apparent; and even offered, it is said, to advance him the money to pay his debts—a proposal which the reckless prince, with all his extravagance and folly, had the spirit and honour to refuse.

By the terms of the wager, his royal highness was to salute every female whom he met, unless she happened to be old or ugly,—a point which the madcaps with him were to decide.

By those who recognised him the salute was received as an honour; and many a grandmother of the present day still boasts of having been kissed at Ranelagh by the Prince of Wales. The scruples of those who felt inclined to resist were generally silenced by the whispered name of the prince—the prince!

A party of three ladies, escorted by several gentlemen, approached. By their dress and manner it was evident that they were good, simple people from the country, come to town upon a holiday trip—most likely a marriage one, as several of the ladies wore love-knots on their stomachers.

Bowing with that exquisite grace which distinguished him from his royal brothers, all of whom, with the exception of the Duke of York, were rather clumsy in their bearing, the prince advanced to the foremost lady of the party — a dove-like, plump, modest-looking beauty, leaning on the arm of a tall, stout gentleman, whose determined look showed that he was ready to protect his charge—and, raising his hat, informed her that he was deputed by the choice spirits in the garden to present their homage to the loveliest women in it in the form of a salute."

"Sir!" faltered the lady, almost too much astonished at his impudence to perfectly comprehend him.

"And therefore," resumed the intruder, "in the due exercise of the judgment, which must be blind to make another choice, and by virtue of the commission entrusted to me, permit me to—nay, do not start."

As the speaker advanced the lady drew back; her companion at first seemed almost struck dumb by the intruder's impudence, or too much astonished to comprehend it. Suddenly, however, recollecting himself, he interposed between the fair one—who, indeed, turned out to be no other than his bride—and her flushed assailant, demanding if he took them for people of low condition, that he presumed to insult them.

"Low condition!" hiccuped the prince; "sir, you are in devilish fine condition, if you are, as I suppose, the husband of that lady, whose ruby lips I positively must salute."

"Back, sir! I am a gentleman and a magistrate."

"And can understand a case of conscience. I am sorry to annoy you, but really I must."

Several parties, amongst others the Duchess of Gordon, Burley, and his companions, had advanced to the spot, highly amused by the scene; their laughing encouraged the half-drunken prince to persevere; he dreaded the bitter, sarcastic humour of the witty peeress, who would not fail to blazon his defeat at half the tea-tables in St. James's, if he suffered himself to be foiled. Accustomed to the protection which his high rank and personal strength generally afforded, he perseveringly advanced, till checked by a violent blow on the chest from the fist of the young lady's protector. There was a general exclamation, and a whisper of "He has struck the prince," who, with all his vice, had too much manliness to assail a man while a female hung upon his arm. The affair, however, began to look serious.

"Serve him right," thought Burley to himself. "Does he think to ride rough-shod over the people?"

Colonel Hamilton looked on, as if highly amused at the ridiculous position in which the prince had placed himself.

"Damnation!" exclaimed the royal libertine—"if you are a gentleman, sir, give me your card."

"Gentleman enough, my fine spark, to give you a thrashing," replied the husband, misconstruing the forbearance of the prince into cowardice, "if you are not off directly."

"Leave him to your minions, as we say in France," whispered the Duke of Orleans in his companion's ear; "he is no gentleman to refuse his card when called upon. Had such a thing occurred in Paris, we should have shut him up in the Bastile for life."

"Bastile be damned!" exclaimed the prince. "The fellow has struck me, and I'll thrash him within an inch of his life. That will give me ten times more satisfaction than having him locked up for life, unless, indeed, he left me in charge of his wife to console her in his absence. Now, my fine fellow," he added, "for fear of an accident, resign that lady to one of your friends, that we may settle this little difference amicably."

But the lady did not choose to be resigned. With the usual embarrassing obstinacy of females when they see their husbands in a quarrel, she increased his difficulty by clinging to his arm the tighter.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," replied the gentleman.

"I regret your resolution," said the prince, blandly, "since it places me in an unpleasant situation; for the touch of a cur dishonours a man of courage."

With these words, much to the amusement of his companions and the by-standers, his royal highness took his richly embroidered handkerchief from his pocket, and wrapped it round his hand, deliberately and carefully, as though he were bandaging a limb. No sooner was it arranged to his satisfaction than he seized his antagonist by the nose, which he pulled severely, apologising all the while with inimitable grace and courtesy to the lady.

The laugh of the ladies and the applause of the gentlemen who witnessed the act inflamed the sluggish temper of the party thus publicly dishonoured, almost to madness. Dropping the arm of the lady, he drew his sword, and rushed upon the prince, who, being unarmed, might have suffered severely in his fury, had not Colonel Hamilton thrust himself between, and with a blow of his hand dashed the weapon aside as it was within an inch of the royal breast.

The cheek of the future monarch had not blenched, for with all his faults he possessed the high courage of an English gentleman. Bowing gracefully, he thanked the colonel for the service he had rendered him.

The screams of the ladies, the cry of "The prince! the prince!" which was repeated from mouth to mouth, soon collected an inconvenient crowd to the spot, and in the confusion many of the parties got separated from their friends; amongst others, the masculine Duchess of Gordon, who, however, was

perhaps more capable of elbowing her way through a crowd than many of the opposite sex.

"I have lost my wager, Orleans," said the prince; "the little gipsy has escaped.—I shall be happy to see you, sir, at Carlton House." This was addressed to Hamilton. "And now then to make the best of our way through the crowd, and reach our carriages as we can."

The announcement of the prince's rank, and the loss of his wife, who had suddenly disappeared amongst the crowd, so completely upset the self-possession of Squire Lucket—for such was the name of the gentleman who used to boast in after-life over his cups that he had fought with the Prince of Wales—that he ran through the gardens, foaming and storming like a madman, roaring at the top of his voice, "Phyllis, Phyllis!" No Phyllis answered him; and the disconsolate Cymon was reluctantly obliged to return to his hotel, in the hope that she had, as soon as she found herself separated from her friends, taken a chair and gone home. The lady, however, was reserved for a very different adventure.

As Hamilton was quitting the gardens, seemingly in great haste, he encountered the fair cause of the fracas we have just described, running about, in a half distracted state, in search of her husband and his friends.

As we said before, she was very young and pretty—one of your sly, quiet beauties, who conceal under a demure demeanour more real passion and sensibility than half a dozen romps and flirts. The colonel eyed her for a few seconds with the eye of a connoisseur, and bowing, requested, in a bland voice, and with a very proper look, to be permitted to escort her to her friends.

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears, and taking his arm with the utmost confidence; "let us go at once. I have been so frightened! Who was that rude man?"

"His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales."

"Who?" demanded the affrighted lady, breathless with astonishment.

The gallant colonel was obliged to repeat the name to make her perfectly comprehend that the gentleman was no other than the heir-apparent to the crown. She was so confused at the intelligence—for, to her country ideas, the Prince of Wales was a sort of deity, to be approached as mandarins do their emperor, with a half-idolatrous worship—that her artful conductor had little difficulty in persuading her to enter a coach, which he called from the stand, and ordered to drive to a house of a convenient character at the west-end of the town, the lady abbess of which was ready for any scheme of villany for which she was well paid.

"And what is your name, my pretty dame?" demanded the young man.

"Phyllis," she replied, blushing, she scarcely knew why, for she began to feel uneasy at being alone in a coach with a fine gentleman, who, for aught she knew, might be a lord, or some great personage. Like most country girls, she had an exaggerated respect for nobility; a title of any kind seemed to invest the possessor with a superiority which raised him above humanity. She had read "Sir Charles Grandison," "Pamela," and most of the twaddling novels of the time, and her little head was as full of romance as her heart was of passion and sensibility. She was like a tinder-box—composed of such inflammable elements that a *spark* was sufficient to cause a conflagration.

The coach, after about an hour's drive, stopped at the door of a large elegant house near St. James's.

"This is not our hotel," she exclaimed, in alarm; "it is there—somewhere in the city."

"I know it," replied her conductor; "but as your husband might not be pleased at your riding alone with a young fellow like myself, I thought best to place you under the protection of my sister, the Duchess of Peterfield. One of the footmen will take a message to your inn, and your jealous husband can come and fetch you. Is not that a thoughtful arrangement?" he added, with a smile.

"Oh, yes!" answered the unsuspecting creature, "How kind and how considerate! for, to tell the truth Richard is a little jealous."

"Most husbands are. They are sad exacting tyrants; for you, I am sure, have never given him cause."

"Never," replied the lady, with much earnestness, "never! Indeed," she added, with an involuntary sigh, "I should be puzzled to do so: for we scarcely ever see a human being, except our rustic neighbours in the country; and I have not the slightest inclination to flirt with them, nor indeed with any one else."

"Indeed," thought the colonel to himself; "we shall see that."

He conducted his unsuspecting victim into a saloon where four or five ladies, dressed in the extreme of the mode, were seated, playing at ombre; to one of these, who was ronged to the eyes, and even more gaudily attired than the rest, he presented the pretty Phyllis—relating the circumstances under which he had been so fortunate as to serve her; and concluded by saying:

"I thought I could not do better, duchess, than place her under your protection till the husband can be apprised where to find her. A house like yours obviates all scandal."

"Of course it does," exclaimed the woman, who took the cue in an instant; "your lordship could not have done better. There never can be any scandal about any lady under my roof."

Had the deceived being been any other than a novice her suspicions must have been excited by the loud laugh with which some of the females received this observation, and the mock respect with which they addressed the speaker as *her grace*. Fearing that the farce would at last become too broad even for her simplicity to be imposed upon, she dismissed them to the drawing-room, declaring that she and her brother would sup in her boudoir in private."

"You really spoil your attendants, duchess," said her pretended brother; "they grow too familiar."

"You forget that my ladies of honour are all gentlewomen," replied the mistress of the mansion; "and I treat them accordingly."

"Ladies of honour!" thought the bewildered Phyllis to herself; "what a great lady she must be!"

A supper was served in a small apartment adjoining a bed-room most luxuriantly furnished. It consisted of every delicacy of the season, and champagne in abundance. Not to appear awkward and countryfied, the poor deluded woman drank, in imitation of her hostess, glass after glass, till her eyes sparkled with the insidious draught, and her quiet demeanour gradually changed to the voluptuous look of the Bacchante.

"Positively, my love, you must take another glass—you will find it delicious after the fritters," exclaimed *her grace*; "besides, it renders you positively irresistible. Look, my lord," she added, "what a com

plexion! Those eyes would do fearful execution in the parks!"

"She is indeed divine," exclaimed the colonel, eyeing her with a look so warm and passionate that it drew the blood into her peach-like cheek. "Her husband is a happy fellow," he added, with a sigh.

Poor Phyllis began to feel uneasy. The tender look which accompanied the compliment disturbed her equanimity; nor could she help contrasting the elegant, handsome person of the speaker with her own good-looking, but very vulgar helpmate; added to which, the wine had excited and confused her. She had, however, sufficient discretion left to decline taking any more.

"One glass more," exclaimed the temptress, "to the health of your gallant protector."

This was a challenge it would have been ungrateful to refuse, as also a second glass to the health of her hostess, who, although a lady of such high rank, who had maids of honour of her own, treated her with a familiarity which was charming. The effect intended was produced. Phyllis was completely thrown off her guard and easily persuaded to retire to rest in the duchess's bed, upon the assurance that the moment her husband arrived all should be explained to him, and that he should be conducted to her room.

"She is very handsome, colonel," whispered the woman, as soon as they were seated alone; "where, in the name of fortune, did you pick her up?"

"As I told you—at Ranelagh."

"Has the prince seen her?"

"Did you not hear," demanded the gentleman, "the story of the kiss?"

"It really was his highness, then?"

"Really."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the creature, with a laugh; "I see you are impatient, and I will not detain you; good night, *my lord*."

"Good night, *duchess*."

The last names were pronounced with the same light, mocking tone in which an actor and actress might address each other by the titles of their respective characters; and the lady, having well represented her character, withdrew, leaving the colonel alone in the house.

About an hour later, poor Phyllis was disturbed

from her first slumber by a footstep and a light in the room.

"Is that you, Richard?" she demanded, half asleep and half awake.

A reply, in a low tone, was made in the affirmative, and the candle was instantly extinguished. The next morning, when she awoke, she found herself in the arms of the gallant colonel.

It would be impossible to paint the storm of grief and tears, reproaches and entreaties, with which the deluded woman replied to his soothings and demand for pardon—pleading his love and her beauty as an excuse.

"You have stained an honest name, my lord," she cried, "and are a villain!"

"You are an angel."

"Leave me!" she continued.

"It's rather late for reproaches now. Hear me," he continued; "my sister knows nothing of this affair, and, if you guard your own counsel, never will. She will conduct you in her carriage to your hotel, and explain to your husband that she found you alone in the garden, terrified to death—that, willing to save you from the pursuit of the prince, she brought you to her house, and kept you with her all night. Her rank and sex," he added, with a smile, "will prevent suspicion. He will be perfectly satisfied, and none the wiser if you keep your own secret. Come," he added, "dry your tears, for the sake of appearances."

The unhappy woman, anxious, as many have been in a similar position, to preserve her reputation, although she had lost her virtue, as ladies wear paste who have parted with their diamonds, suffered herself to be persuaded and consoled—a task which the colonel's handsome person and insinuating manners rendered less difficult than it would have been to ordinary men.

"We shall meet again, my angel," he whispered, as he left the room.

"Never," she answered, with a burning blush, and fixing her eyes upon the floor, unable to bear the triumphant look with which he regarded her; "never! You have destroyed my peace of mind by your treachery. Go—the sight of you is hateful to me."

Hamilton was too experienced in the arts of the sex to take every thing he heard for gospel, or to despair of softening the rigour even of the most obdurate. But although he had thus gratified his love, he was not so heartless as to permit the consequences to fall upon the head of his victim. By his instruction, the mistress of the mansion, attired in an elegant morning dress, in a hired carriage, with servants in rich liveries, drove the disconsolate Phyllis to the inn in the Borough, where the distracted husband had just returned, after passing the night in hunting over half the streets of London.

"Don't be confused," said the experienced woman of the world to the trembling creature who accompanied her; "there is nothing like an air of unconcern. It disarms suspicion, and puts a husband off his guard. Here, smell at my etui."

The astonished waiter announced to the equally astonished husband the name of the Duchess of Peterfield, as the ladies entered the room. The unhappy squire, who had passed the night tormented by jealousy and doubt, was pale as death, but his cheek became suddenly flushed as he beheld her.

"My wife!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, your wife," repeated the pretended duchess; "and you may thank me for having taken such care of her. Poor child," she added, "I found her like a frightened doe, roaming here and there through the gardens, looking for its lost mate. It was fortunate I happened to notice her. I tremble to think what hands she might have fallen into!"

"And so do I!" exclaimed the grateful husband, receiving his lost doe into his arms with the most unsuspecting confidence, and kissing away her tears "How can I thank your grace?"

"By taking better care of the poor child for the future. There, good bye, dear," she added, kissing the brow of the fair creature whom she had so cruelly betrayed; "I must return home directly to dress for court; the queen has just sent for me; but I was determined to see you safely home myself. No ceremony, no ceremony; I can find the way to my carriage."

With these words the brazen creature, who had assumed the name of one of the most respectable ladies in the peerage, flounced out of the room down the staircase to her carriage, followed by the bowing husband and the obsequious landlady and servants, who had never set their eyes upon a real live duchess before; the latter, for years after, spoke of different events as having accrued so long before, or so long after, the Duchess of Peterfield *stayed* at her hotel.

"It is a fine thing to be one of the quality," observed the pretty blue-eyed chambermaid to the head waiter, as the gaudy hired equipage drove off. "She is a fine woman."

"As fine as paint, patches, and silks, can make her, replied the fellow, chucking the speaker under the chin; "but give me flesh and blood; I much rather——"

A playful box on the ears from the girl interrupted his speech, which he construed into a challenge, and began struggling for a kiss, and would have won it too, had not the shrill voice of the landlady put an end to the amorous encounter.

Squire Lucket began to make a thousand apologies to his wife as soon as the great lady had left them. They were received, at first, with sullen indifference; for she naturally felt angry at his conduct on the preceding night, which had exposed her to so fearful a risk. Gradually and politically she suffered herself to be pacified by his entreaties and excuses, secretly congratulating herself upon his unsuspicious nature. Not that the squire was really unsuspicious, but, like most of the English gentry, he had that slavish respect for the aristocracy, that he deemed the word of a duchess as sacred as the word of holy writ: it would have been a species of blasphemy to have doubted either.

"Come, Phyllis," he exclaimed, "thou shalt not be alone to-night. Let me see a smile upon that ponting lip. Give me a kiss—and instead of staying a fortnight in London, thou shalt have a month."

"I'd rather go home at once," said his wife; "the bustle and confusion in the streets, the impudence of the men, who stare at every woman they meet, have quite cured me of all desire for a town life. I am sure," she added, "I shall never forget last night."

"I suppose you did not sleep very well, my dear?"

"Not too well."

"Started, and were uneasy?"

"Rather so."

"Missed me from your side?"

"Indeed I did not. But never mind last night, it's all over now," she added, with a sigh, "and I have no wish to think of it again. Let's bid our cousins at Bow good-bye, and start to-morrow for Essex. I shan't feel happy till I am at home again."

Giving her a hasty smack, the delighted squire swore she was the best little wife in the world; and that very day, to prove the sincerity of his assertion, presented her with a handsome suite of garnets as a peace-offering. The next day, at an early hour, they started for the country.

About three o'clock on the same day that Phyllis returned to her husband, the handsome Colonel Hamilton, after dressing himself with the most scrupulous care, ordered a chair, and got himself conveyed to Carlton House, then the abode of the Prince of Wales, the temple of fashion, folly, and the most refined debauchery. Orders had been given to admit him, and he was conducted by the groom of the chambers through a succession of rooms, furnished with almost Eastern luxury; carpets glowing with the brilliant colours of the East covered the inlaid floors; and pictures, from the masterly pencils of Titian, Guido, and the great Italian masters, adorned the walls; all that luxury and wealth, directed by taste, could accomplish, had been done. As the gallant colonel passed through the gorgeous rooms, his eyes gradually brightened and his step became firmer. He felt that at last he was in his proper sphere.

At the door of the prince's cabinet his conductor resigned him to the care of a page, a demure, discreet-looking boy, of about sixteen—a fellow who, young as he was, had seen more debauchery and life—to use the cant parlance of the day—than half the men about town. Taking the visitor's card upon a golden salver, he gently opened the door of the cabinet, and entered, carefully closing it after him.

In about two minutes he threw open the door and bowed, in intimation that the visitor might enter, pronouncing loudly:

"Colonel Hamilton, your royal highness."

The heir-apparent was seated, or rather half-reclining, upon a couch, enveloped in a *robe de chambre* of rose-coloured velvet, bound round his waist by silver cords and tassels; his hair was undressed, half the powder shaken out; and he looked pale and haggard from last night's debauch. Still it was impossible not to observe the manly beauty of his face, despite the dissipation which impaired it.

"Welcome, my dear colonel," said his royal highness, rising and gracefully pointing to a seat. "I am your debtor for last night's service, though so poor a one as to be a beggar in all but thanks, which you must permit me to offer."

"And which are more than sufficient payment for any trifling service I may have had the good fortune to render your highness, who I trust experienced no inconvenience from last night's——"

Here the speaker paused an instant for a word, which the prince supplied by adding:

"Folly?"

"Caprice, your highness—caprice."

"The worst of it is, the infernal papers have heard of the affair, and a fine handle they have made of it—poor Orleans is handled worse than I am."

"The editors want caning."

"They are devilish impertinent, to be sure. Maitland has already written a contradiction, which Hanger is to take to the evening papers, and insist on its being inserted; of course no one will believe it, but it looks well. By the bye, Colonel Hamilton, I don't see your name in the British Army List.'

"It is not in the British Army List, your royal highness."

"But you have served?"

"Several years—in France."

"Not under Lafayette, I hope!" exclaimed the prince, his brow slightly contracting; for, although he interfered but little in politics, his natural aristocratic tastes made him abhor those who had drawn the sword in the great struggle between England and her colonies on the side of the people.

"No, your highness; the regiment I served in was the *gard du corps* of the Count D'Artois, the brother of his most Christian majesty."

"I rejoice to hear it," said the prince, smiling graciously; "tell me, for you must have had an opportunity of judging, are the stories of the count which Orleans tells me really true? Does he learn to dance upon the tight-rope?"

"I have heard so."

"And never seen?" demanded the prince, curiously.

"Pardon me, your highness," said the colonel; "*but what I have seen* of the Count D'Artois while in his service I make a point of honour to forget."

"Spoken like a gentleman," said the prince, "and I esteem you for it. By-the-bye, have you heard the news? The poor Duchess of Gordon, during the row last night, caused by my escapade, was plundered of her diamonds. But that I am so infernally poor, I ought, in common gallantry, to replace them."

Of course the colonel expressed his regret and *surprise* at her grace's loss; and the conversation soon after took a general turn, in which the soldier displayed so much ready wit and repartee, that the royal libertine was charmed, and declared that he must belong to his set; and concluded by inviting him to dinner that day week—a condescension most unusual, as royal invitations are seldom given by word of mouth.

"By-the-bye," said his royal highness, as Colonel Hamilton rose to depart, "I have a little commission for you to execute. Leave this letter in your way home at a rascally old money lender's and usurer in the Temple. I do not wish my household to know that I have written to him. Many of them are little better than spies upon me."

Hamilton took the letter with a profound bow of gratitude for the confidence reposed in him, and found that it was addressed to Mr. Prim.

"One of my carriages is in waiting for you," resumed the prince, as he rose from his seat, and bowed, to intimate to his visitor that his audience was over.

"This is beyond my hope," whispered Hamilton to himself, as, seated in one of the royal carriages, he rolled luxuriously towards the Temple. "As the accredited agent of the prince, he cannot suspect me."

Prim, lawyer Prim, whom few of our readers, I dare say, have forgotten, was seated in his office when the royal messenger was ushered in. As he was now getting very old, he had retired in a great measure from the legal part of his profession, except in the cases of a very few rich clients, and confined himself to money-lending, in which capacity he was daily increasing his overflowing hoards.

After reading the prince's letter, which he carefully locked in the desk, he merely told the colonel that it should be attended to.

"And now," said the messenger, "I have an affair of my own. I want a thousand pounds."

"Upon what security?" demanded the usurer.

"My mother's diamonds."

He produced a casket, and opened it upon the table before the old man, who, after weighing them, and looking them over one by one, consented to advance the money, at twenty-five per cent., for one year.

The necessary papers were signed and the cheque given. That very day, Colonel Hamilton drove in one of the royal carriages to Coutts, and opened an account there for one thousand pounds.

It was not more than half the value of the Duchess of Gordon's lost jewels.

CHAPTER XXI.

The thing pursued oft worthless seems when won:
The chase yields all the pleasure.

The sudden and unexpected dissolution of parliament, in consequence of a defeat of the ministry, sent most of those who were connected with the political world into the country, to prepare for the coming elections, to secure their seats, talk of patriotism and purity of election, to prove their sincerity by ruining the honest tenant who ventured to oppose his landlord's will, and to buy the votes of all who were prepared to sell them. Amongst those whom it occasioned to leave town was Burley—an opposition to his return had been commenced, and he hastened personally to canvass the electors.

"Do you wish me to see the marquis before I leave town?" demanded Lord Erringcourt, who had been summoned to Paris to attend his dying sister.

"At such a moment to request it, my dear lord," replied the young man, "would be unfeeling; besides, I am not altogether sure that the conduct of Lady Georgina has been ingenuous towards me — she has positively been encouraging the attentions of the dean. I will, therefore, await your return."

The quivering lip and agitated tone in which he spake showed how deeply his feelings were at stake in the sincerity of the object upon whom he had placed his affections.

"As you will, Burley," replied the earl; "but, my dear boy, let me entreat of you not to trifle with your happiness. If any thing occurs, write to me in Paris, and I will communicate with the marquis by letter. God bless you!"

With these words the kind-hearted peer and his ward parted—the former to proceed upon his melancholy journey to Paris, and the latter into the north to canvass his late constituents.

"We are fortunate!" exclaimed the marquis, one morning, a few days after the dissolution had taken place.

"How so, my lord?" demanded Fitzgerald, who had not yet seen the papers.

"There is a vacancy upon the episcopal bench—the Bishop of Tythetail died yesterday. It is true the see is one of the poorest; but that, I imagine, can be no objection: we can easily add a prebendal stall or a fat rectory to it. I wish, however, for your sake, it had been better."

His guest assured the speaker that the revenue was a matter of perfect indifference; all that he aimed at was the episcopal rank, which would give him the long-coveted seat in the House of Lords.

"Well, then," resumed the marquis, "I will wait upon the premier without loss of time; for no sooner does a loaf or a fish fall to the disposal of government than there are a thousand applications for it. Your recent elevation to the deanery," he added, "will be against you, the king is so ridiculously fastidious respecting church preferment. But, as I have said before, three boroughs and my own vote in the upper house are not to be treated slightingly. You will hear news from me at dinner."

With these words the speaker ordered his carriage, and departed for the residence of the prime minister.

Fitzgerald meanwhile walked into the park to speculate upon his chances of success, and to await the return of his patron.

The peer was at once admitted to the minister, whom he found involved in the business of the elections upon which the continuance of his party in office depended; for, although he had the determined support of his majesty, who was one of the most obstinate men in the three kingdoms, he felt that it would be unsafe as well as unconstitutional to resist the will of the nation, should it be decidedly expressed against him through their new representatives.

"Thank you, Sourton—very kind," exclaimed the statesman, extending his hand, "to visit me in this state of things. Nothing of consequence has happened—no rebellion, I hope, has occurred in any of your boroughs? The returns there, I trust, are all secure?"

"Perfectly so, my lord," said the peer; "not a voter dares dream of any other choice than mine," was the constitutional reply. "No, no—they know me too well; besides, not a tenant has a lease upon the strength of which he can brave me. A vile invention those leases, my lord—a vile invention; they make voters independent. A fortunate affair that, the death of the Bishop of Tythetail," he added; "just in the nick of time, since it enables you to serve a friend."

"Rather say, to disoblige fifty," was the reply; "for I am sure I have had fifty applications already. Luckily it is one of the poorest sees—had it been Durham or York I should have been overwhelmed. First, the primate, who has great influence with the king; next the universities;—these political friends are all eager to recommend their candidate. I am at a loss where to find seats, too, for Plausible and Subtle; no chance of their old ones. Lord Slippery has ratted, and the opposition is too strong."

The gentlemen in question were useful to the minister—the former being his private secretary, and the latter an admirable debater.

"I think they might be accommodated," replied his visitor, significantly; "*I have three seats at my disposal.*"

"My dear Sourton, this is indeed kind!" exclaimed the delighted premier. "I know of no service more acceptable that could be rendered either to his majesty or the government at the present crisis; and any thing in the power of the crown or cabinet to confer you may rely——"

The speaker stopped abruptly, for he was aware that he was treading upon dangerous ground. He knew that the marquis had upon most occasions supported government, but had invariably retained the nominations to his boroughs in his own hands—filled the seats by men of straw—poor, crouching, needy dependants—so that he could at any time turn round upon the ministry if he chose.

"Sourton," resumed the premier, after a pause, "let us be candid with each other. I have known you too well to expect that you will resign so great an influence without an equivalent. Be frank with me, and let me know at once what you expect."

"The elevation of my friend and future son-in-law to the vacant see," coolly answered the marquis.

"What the new dean of Hereford!" exclaimed the astonished minister; "why he has but just kissed hands upon his last appointment. The thing is unprecedented."

"So is my offer—three members for a bishop are no bad exchange."

"But you know that his majesty is very particular in cases of church preferment: he will never be induced to give his consent."

"His majesty, I believe, is infuriated against the opposition?" observed the marquis.

"True; but what of that?"

"A threat of resignation would bring him to his senses. But heaven forbid, my lord," continued the wily negotiator, "that I should force the royal conscience, or press my services. *Three* seats in the Commons and my personal influence in the upper house are not to be conciliated every day."

"But I shall disoblige a host of claimants," observed the premier, "which will neutralise your help."

"Show me the party on whom you can confer it without disobliging the host you speak of," replied the marquis, "and I will at once withdraw my claim."

"Come, be reasonable, Sourton," said the minister. "If the reverend gentleman is not satisfied with the income of the deanery, we can add a prebendal stall, or a living or two: his late appointment was no bad commencement for an undistinguished man."

The noble visitor heard his friend with his usual quiet courtesy till he had finished, and then answered:

"Mr. Fitzgerald, my lord, is no undistinguished man; he was a fellow of his college, and took the highest honours of the university. As for a prebendal stall," he added, in a tone of contempt, "it would be perfectly valueless to him, as his private fortune already equals those of half the mem bers of the peerage."

"If so rich, a bishopric must be of less consequence to him."

"Pardon me, my lord; he has a talent for politics, and is perhaps a little ambitious of distinction. You remember the pamphlet called 'What Next?' which so severely lashed the opposition?"

"I do," exclaimed the earl, "and thought that it contained some of the cleverest writing of the day. Do you know the author?"

"The Dean of Hereford," replied the marquis.

"Indeed! Sufficient recommendation," replied the great man, musing. "He would be dangerous in the opposition should he turn against us. Of course, my lord, you vouch for his principles?"

"As for my own!" exclaimed his visitor. "Come, my lord," he added, "I will make no niggard bargain with you; I offer you the disposal of my three boroughs and my own vote in the upper house; besides which, you will have the deanery to dispose of; for I know that my future son-in-law would not wish to hold it, although it has been customary with so poor a see as that of Tythetail."

"I can not represent it to his majesty," sighed the premier; "I know that he is very anxious that Mr. Plausible, who has been marked and ousted by the opposition, should be returned. He was pleased, also, to express his approbation of the pamphlet you alluded to. Do you remain in town?"

"Yes, till the affair is decided," said the marquis, smiling, "which I conclude it soon will be, for the king has gone too far to yield to the opposition, and must pay a little for the support of his friends. A threat to resign, my lord, and all will be arranged."

"But will that be generous?" demanded the minister.

"It will be better, my lord—it will be successful. When shall I hear from you?"

"To-morrow."

"Good!"

"I go to Windsor in an hour; if successful, I will send you the names of the three nominees for the boroughs."

With this understanding, the two noblemen parted, each secretly contented with his bargain, although the wily minister had the tact to conceal his feelings on the occasion.

His Majesty George the Third was at this period in the prime of life, and held his court at Windsor. The very same day on which the above conversation took place he was in his closet, evidently in no very amiable mood, when the page entered to announce the arrival of the prime minister, whom his royal master had for several hours been impatiently expecting.

"So, come at last!" exclaimed the king, in his usual quick way of speaking; "ha! fine state the country is thrown into from the vote of the rascally opposition! Poor Plausible thrown out—good man, and a loyal subject—very. Make him a peer—do you hear, my lord?—a peer—I am determined."

"Does it strike your majesty it would be a greater triumph if we could secure the return of Mr. Plansible for the Commons?" replied the premier, blandly. "There his talents as a debater would be more available; added to which, the position of the gentleman with respect to fortune is not such as to qualify him for the peerage."

"No matter; send him to India—somewhere to make one. Rebels—democrats—to upset the country, and oblige me to dissolve parliament—just in turnip time, too—no consideration!"

The statesman smiled at the idea of the king's farming propensities being classed in the same category as the destinies of a mighty nation.

"But how—eh—what?" continued the speaker; "can you get poor Plausible a seat? Good—good—very."

"I have received offers of assistance from the Marquis of Sourton, who has three boroughs at his disposal. Hitherto he has only occasionally supported the government; I am now commissioned to offer his full adherence to your majesty, and to nominate any three gentlemen you may condescend to approve."

"Three! three!" cried the king, rubbing his hands—his constant habit when pleased; "let's see. Plausible, Subtle, Majorbanks. Good—good—we shall onst the opposition yet—eh, my lord?"

"Little doubt, sire," replied the minister. "This alliance of Lord Sourton's is most important, although his views are somewhat high, and will, I fear, interfere with your majesty's wishes."

"My wishes! Where? How so, my lord?"

"As regards the vacant see of Tythetail; he demands it for his future son-in-law, the new Dean of Hereford."

"What!" exclaimed the king, who, whatever his faults as a monarch, had a profound respect for religion; "I'll have no tampering with spiritualities. My lord, my lord, this is exceeding our favour."

"Nothing could have induced me, sire, to make such a proposition to your majesty, but the difficulties in which the cabinet is placed. If the proposition be not complied with, the marquis goes over to the opposition, as he plainly hinted."

"The political rat!" exclaimed the king.

"The gentleman in question," resumed the minister, "I can vouch to be a most exemplary character. I heard the lord primate the other day extol his dili-

gence and liberality as dean; and, moreover, I know that this elevation is not his own seeking, although he merits it so well."

"I am glad to hear it—very glad," said the monarch, snappishly; "the imprudence of the request shall do him no ill in our opinion; but the thing, my lord, is impossible—quite—quite."

"Moreover," continued the noble lord, "your majesty may judge of the talent of the gentleman in question, when I state that he is the author of that sound and constitutional pamphlet, 'What Next?' which I believe was honoured by your gracious approbation."

"All matters for future consideration, my lord, but perfectly useless on the present occasion."

The firmness with which the king spoke, and the well-known tenacity with which he stuck to his opinions, convinced the premier that there was but one more chance—the threat of resignation; nothing else he knew would move him. Waiting till his majesty, who during the interval had been pacing up and down the royal closet, came to a standstill, he bent the knee before him.

"What now—what now, my lord?"

"I regret that I have but one duty to perform," answered the statesman. "Whilst I thought there was a chance of guarding the prerogative of the crown from the reckless attacks of those who lead a factious opposition, I remained firm in my resolution not to resign. This unfortunate decision of your majesty's will so weaken the government, that to hold out will be impossible. I beg leave, therefore, most respectfully to tender my resignation."

"Resignation, my lord!" exclaimed the king, in astonishment. "Resignation! Very well—very. We can dispense with your further services. All alike—all alike!"

"When will it please your majesty," continued the premier, "to hold a council to receive the seals of myself and colleagues, for I speak in the name of the entire cabinet?"

"As soon as my arrangements are completed," replied his majesty, "the lord steward of the household will demand them by warrant under the sign manual. I wish no further intercourse with one who, in the hour of danger, can thus abandon the helm."

"Sire," said the premier, firmly but respectfully, "deign to do me justice. Have I, since my accession to office, ever solicited a single favour for myself or family?"

"No—no—no," said the king, quickly, "you have not."

"Then believe me, sire, nothing but the existence of the cabinet, which depends upon a compliance with Lord Sourton's demands, could have induced me to submit the proposition which I have made; for, despite the unimpeachable character of the gentleman recommended, the compact is, from its very nature, distasteful to me; yet, as the lesser evil, I embraced it. Your majesty, in the exercise of your undoubted prerogative, has refused to sanction it, and by that refusal virtually dismissed the cabinet. Do us not, then, the injustice to attribute our resignation to want of loyalty or attachment to your crown and person."

The king paced the apartment evidently much distressed; the firm tone of his minister, to whom he was attached, and his indignation at the opposition, had moved his resolution.

"You say the dean is not only unconscious of this treaty, my lord, but unambitious of the mitre?"

"I have every reason to believe so, sire."

"And his character is unimpeachable?" continued the monarch.

"To that I can speak positively."

"It's an awful responsibility," said the king, seriously; "but, considering that the welfare of my people demands it, I consent. Better that a temporary error creep into the church than that the first great bulwark of the constitution—the royal prerogative—should be destroyed."

His majesty held out his hand to his minister in token of renewed confidence.

"My gracious sovereign," said the premier, kneeling, and kissing it, "you have decided wisely. I pledge my life that we defeat the miserable faction that would dictate to the crown."

"It is a heavy price, though, my lord," sighed the monarch; "I had destined the vacant see for a very worthy man. I'll thank you to bear in mind that I have a voice in the disposal of the next bishopric. But to end this unpleasant affair at once," he added, taking up a stamped sheet of paper, and hastily writing his name at the top of it, "there's the sign manual; my lord chancellor will complete the requisite forms. And now, having finished the affairs of state, come, my lord, and pay your respects to the queen. You shall have cream from her own dairy and a dinner from the farm."

Thus terminated the interview which decided the prospects of Fitzgerald.

The following day the premier himself announced to the marquis the success of his mission. The arrangements were completed with all possible speed, and within a fortnight the Dean of Hereford was consecrated at Lambeth, by the Archbishop of Canterbury, bishop of the ancient see of Tythetail.

It is not to be supposed that a promotion so rapid, so unexampled in the annals of church patronage, failed to attract remark. The opposition papers were loud in their indignation at what they termed the "Church and State job." A thousand reports were circulated, and, by turns, believed or rejected. The new prelate cared little for the reports or for any discovery that could now be made respecting his descent from the obnoxious house of Derwentwater. He had done homage at a private audience at Windsor, and was, to all intents and purposes, a peer of parliament, a dignity from which nothing but an act of the legislature could remove him, and of that he had little to fear.

It was soon rumoured that the new bishop was about to become the son-in-law of the Marquis of Sourton; but even this did not account for the magnificent mansion he had taken in St. James's Square or for the gorgeous furniture and equipages he had ordered.

"There will soon be a bishop in the bankrupt list, I am thinking," observed one.

"Does the prelate think the see of Tythetail like the Mediterranean—inexhaustible?" demanded another.

"Lady Georgina's fortune cannot be great, for the estates are strictly entailed, and the marquis is not the man to save," observed a third.

The day for the opening of the new parliament at last arrived, and the new bishop took the oaths and his seat as a spiritual peer. Many a curious eye glanced at the splendid state carriage in which the right reverend lord proceeded to the house; for emblazoned on its panels were the well-remembered arms of Derwentwater—shorn, indeed, of the coronet

which once adorned them, but, in its place, the mitre showed scarcely less lordly.

Fitzgerald's connection with the family of Derwentwater spread like wildfire through the house, and he received the congratulations of many who had been the friends of his unfortunate ancestor—men who were too selfish to stir themselves to aid the friendless heir of that once powerful house by their political interest, but who were rejoiced to see one of the race again in the legislature.

While his lordship was taking the oaths, many of the peers were gathered in knots, conversing over the benches with each other on the probable events of the session.

"Whose voice is that?" demanded our readers' old acquaintance, Lord Moreton, turning very pale.

It was the clear, distinct tone of the prelate taking the oaths, to which he alluded.

"That?—Oh, that is Sourton's intended son-in-law, the new Bishop of Tythetail," replied Lord Harry, or rather the Earl of Heartley we should have said, since he had succeeded to the peerage by his father's death.

Lord Moreton turned, and his eye encountered Fitzgerald's. Although years had elapsed since their hostile encounter, they recognised each other in an instant. The countenance of the former became almost livid with surprise, remorse, and terror. It seemed as if Heaven, after so many years of impunity, was about to launch the avenging bolt at last. The prelate regarded him with the quiet look which a peaceful conscience gives—towards him, at least, he had nothing to reproach himself.

"By heavens!" exclaimed Lord Heartley, crossing over to the bishop, and shaking him warmly by the hand, "but it is my old friend and Mentor. Welcome, my dear lord—a thousand welcomes to a seat in the legislature of your country!"

Lord Moreton, unable to conquer his emotion, immediately left the house.

"Heaven defend me from my friends!" exclaimed the premier, haughtily, as he passed from his seat before the throne, after assisting to open parliament as one of the royal commission. "I can guard against my enemies. You have indeed aided our political existence!" This was addressed to the Marquis of Sourton.

The lord chancellor had cast dissatisfied glances towards the new prelate, who returned them by looks of equal defiance, and a brow as haughty as his own.

"We must to Windsor, my lord," whispered the lawyer to the minister, "to repair this fatal error. I remember that the all powerful Chatham failed to move his majesty's resentment towards the Radcliffs, and abandoned the new made bishop, then a young man of considerable talent, to obscurity. Unfortunately the oaths are administered, and the deed is irrevocable. Better that the king should learn the truth from us than from some good-natured friend."

"This will, I fear, prove the wreck of our political existence," exclaimed the premier. "The king will never forgive the deception, or believe that we have not been a party to it."

"He braves it nobly," said the chancellor. "Does he imagine that the revenues of his bishopric are inexhaustible, or that the interest of the marquis is sufficiently strong to procure the reversion of the attainder of his family? Walpole's policy in settling the estates on Greenwich Hospital has, I think, taken good care of forbidding all hope of that. He must draw in his love of display, or he will soon be a ruined man."

"Little fear of that," replied the statesman; "he is rich. I have just heard that his private fortune exceeds forty thousand a year in landed property alone. With such an income at his disposal, commanding talent, a seat for life in the house, and the sympathy of a large body of peers, who still regret the fatal necessity which condemned his ancestors to the block, what may he not hope to achieve? He has shown that he is no mean tactician by the manner in which he has contrived to hoodwink both the king and government. I am more enraged with the marquis than the prelate," added the speaker; "for him to have played his party such a trick is inexcusable. Putting the king's displeasure aside, I can scarcely regret the bishop's elevation. It was a sad necessity which condemned the unfortunate Radcliff to the block. But his wealth, religion, and popularity with the northern people condemned him."

"Would," said the chancellor, "we could get rid of his descendant in the same way! I have just recollected," he added, "the source of the bishop's wealth; the old Jacobite, Lord Bamff, disinherited his nephew in his favour. The will was drawn by Lord Selkirk and Judge Burton, and caused much conversation at the time. What on earth has he been doing with himself ever since?"

"Living at his rectory, near Sourton's."

"He must have paid smartly for the marquis's interest?"

"Why, yes," said the minister; "we know by experience that the marquis is not apt to underrate his support. If the debate on the address goes well, perhaps his majesty may be satisfied. At worst," continued his lordship, "it can only end in a resignation; and that is an event I by no means dread, for I am tired of the cares and trials of office."

"So am not I," responded his less wealthy and more active colleague. "You have fortune and hereditary wealth apart from office. I fall from the dignity of one of the first subjects in the realm to that of a poor stipendiary baron with a miserable pension of four thousand a-year—no very agreeable prospect."

The premier shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"Why, yes, my lord; I have thought it hard upon professional men that they should depend on the existence of a cabinet for the continuance of their revenues. In or out of office, in my opinion, they should be for life."

"No bad measure for the cabinet," answered the chancellor.

The statesman was silent—too wary to commit himself upon such a delicate subject.

"Tell me, my lord," he demanded, after a pause—"do you know the reason why his majesty honours the house of Derwentwater wit such peculiar hatred? Surely the heads of two of the family might have been sufficient to expiate their crime."

"Crime!" repeated the chancellor.

"Well, then," added the earl, who more than suspected the secret leaning of his colleague, "their want of success."

"They may thank Bute," replied the man of law; "he hated the Derwentwaters for some fancied injuries, and worked so successfully to instil into the mind of his royal pupil his own feelings, that it has become, I fear, impossible now to eradicate them. Have you never observed," he added, lowering his voice, "that whenever his majesty once embraces an idea it becomes immoveable?—no reasoning, no change of circumstances can shake it; he adheres to it with a tenacity which argues a degree of——"

The speaker stopped short.

"Which argues what, my lord?" demanded the premier.

"Insanity," whispered the chancellor.

"Insanity!" repeated the astonished statesman.

"Neither more nor less," continned the man of law, whose acute mind had detected the germ of that malady in the nnfortunate monarch, which afterwards became so fatally developed. "I have watched it in his looks, in his hurried and restless manner. Sometimes I think his majesty is himself aware of his approaching infirmity, and seeks to fly from it; hence his firm adherence to an opinion when once he has conceived that opinion to be right; he fears to change, lest he shonld be yielding to disease and not conviction."

"This becomes serious, my lord," replied the premier; "if snch is yonr opinion, and I confess the probability startles me, ought not parliament to be apprised of it? Remember that we are responsible te the nation."

"Not more than to the king," interrupted the chancellor. "Till some decided act or symptom should appear, I hold that we should be guilty of treason in bringing the question of his majestv's sanity before the country."

"It is not the present state of the royal mind, but what the royal mind may be verging to. Should any parliamentary inquiry be instituted, and the king fonnd incapable of gniding the helm of government, how should we answer to the conntry for our conduct? Would not the people say that we had continued in office despite his imbecllity? A fine handle for the opposition!"

"At least, I will have an eye upon him," said the chancellor.

By the bye," continned the premier, "I cannot understand why, after we had arranged that his majesty should open parliament in person, you so snddenly opposed it, or rather that his majesty declined. It was after your visit to Windsor?"

"It was."

"Had that visit any thing to de with the change?"

"Every thing; bnt remember, my lord, that for the present the affair must be a secret."

"Certainly."

"Two days after the speech had been approved of in council and forwarded to Windsor, I received a message to go down privately to the queen, who is not such a simpleton as the world has been led to suppose. Her majesty informed me that for several evenings she had heard the king, as is his custom before the opening, rehearsing his speech."

"Well, my lord, I see nothing so remarkable in that."

"And he invariably commenced with 'My lords and peacocks,' which, as her majesty sagaciously observed, could not be the real commencement of the speech."

"I should think not," [exclaimed the astonished premier. "What did you advise?"

"That her majesty should say nothing abont it, but just hint to the king's physician that she wished the king not to open parliament in person, giving as a reason the late outrage attempted on his royal person."

"And well advised too, my lord. Only imagine the confusion of the cabinet, the astonishment of both honses, and the triumph of the opposition, had his majesty commenced his speech, 'My lords and peacocks:' we never should have got over it."

"I thought so too, my lord," replied the chancellor, "and seeing that my advice would be taken, returned to London."

CHAPTER XXII.

"The course of true love never did run smooth."

Lady Georgina was indisposed—not with that illness which confines the snffering patient to the sick couch, bnt with a malady at the heart; for Burley's silence had both pained and piqued her. It had previonsly been arranged between them that overtures should be made by the Earl of Erringcourt to her father; and, although she had read in the papers an account of that nobleman's departnre for Paris to attend his dying sister, still she thought that Burley might have written. His silence looked like neglect or caprice, and she felt wonnded in proportion to the strength of her passiou. Little did the lovely girl imagine that letter after letter had been sent by her distracted lover, who had heard the reports ef her intended marriage, which had been industriously set in circulation; little did she nnderstand the smiles and significant glances which she observed when she appeared in public, leaning on the bishop's arm, in whose society she felt pleasure, not merely on accouut of his intellectual acquirements, but because she hoped that it would protect her from the attentions of others; little did she deem that those smiles and looks were levelled at herself. She was not, however, permitted to remain long in this state of uncertainty.

The marchioness and Lady Heartley, who had entered eagerly into the plot—more perhaps from dislike to Burley than from any positive zeal for the prelate—were commissiened by her father to inform her of her destiny.

"How well the dear bishop looks!" said the marchioness, as they were seated in her boudoir. "I declare he is handsomer in his wig than before; don't you think so, Georgina, my love?"

"I—oh—yes," replied the heartsick girl, whose thonghts at that moment were very differently occupied. "I think it a great improvement; before, he looked too yonng for his sacred office."

"An odd fault for *you* to find, my dear," said Lady Heartley.

"And why for me, dear aunt?" demanded the surprised Georgina.

"Come, come," said her mother, "it's impossible that yon can have mistaken his lordship's attentions; and after such public encouragement, too! Fie, my love! A little flirtation is all very well; but with a bishop yon ought to be more ingennous."

"I assure you, my dear mother, that I am totally unconscious of the meaning of your allusion. His lordship's attentions!" she repeated. "Yon cannot suppose they were more than friendly?"

"Indeed! but I do suppose it," replied the marchioness; "and to prove that I am correct in my supposition, I am commissioned to inform you that he had made proposals to your father much too advantageous to be rejected. Fie! fie! I am shocked at your ccquetting."

"Coquetting!" exclaimed the bewildered girl, who began to suspect that she had fallen into a snare. "Indeed yon wrong me. The attentions of the bishop never were of a character to lead me to suppose that he had other thoughts than those of friendship, or I never could have permitted them."

"Not permitted them!" exclaimed Lady Heartley.

"Why, do you know, my dear, he is the best match in the market, at least for the present season. Forty thousand a year landed property, to say nothing of his bishopric."

"The settlements which he has offered," said her mother, "are princely, and such as no girl in her senses would think of refusing."

"But wealth," sighed Georgina, "is not the only requisite to ensure happiness in the marriage state."

"At least it is the principal," urged her worldly-minded mother.

"I can never love him."

"No one is so unreasonable as to ask it," replied her aunt. "Love is all very well in romance, but in real life it is superfluous. You will find in him a friend, an intellectual companion, a guide, and *banker*, and that is all that any reasonable woman can expect. I married for love, my dear, and can speak from experience how little it has to do with happiness in the married state. Besides," she added, "what can you object to his lordship? Is he not handsome?"

"Oh, yes. That is, I never once thought upon the subject," replied the persecuted girl.

"His character and family are unexceptionable?" The young lady was silent.

"Georgina," said the marchioness, "don't act like a fool, and throw away the chance of an establishment which not one girl of your acquaintance but would jump at. If you never intended to have him, why permit things to proceed so far? All the world expects it, I assure you."

"I care not for the world," replied her daughter, roused to defend herself; "and as for the attentions of the prelate, his age and character I conceived justified me in receiving from him what I certainly should have checked in a younger man."

"Absurd!" exclaimed Lady Heartley. "Because the dear bishop wears an apron, do you think he is to be treated like an old woman or a child?"

"How could I possibly suspect his motives? He never spoke one word of love."

"Of course not," continued her aunt; "a bishop should never talk of such things; it would be indecorous—yet it is all understood. But you must have known from the newspapers what his intentions were. Look here," she continued, taking up several

journals which were upon the table, but which, up to that moment, had been carefully kept from Georgina's sight, and from which she read paragraph after paragraph:

"A marriage, we understand, is on the *tapis* between the daughter of a noble marquis and a right reverend prelate."

Then lower down:

"The Bishop of Tythetail is, we believe, the only unmarried prelate on the bench. It was to him that the paragraph in another part of our paper alluded, and the lovely Lady Georgina Sourton."

Poor Lady Georgina clasped her hands in agony.

The marchioness took up another paper and read:

"The Bishop of Tythetail and his intended bride appeared for the first time in public together at Lady Berkeley's party since the public announcement of their approaching union. The bride elect looked all consciousness. We understand that his majesty has expressed a wish for the speedy celebration of the interesting nuptials, as he does not wish that the members of the hierarchy should be unmarried."

"You see," said her mother, "how you have committed yourself."

"There is yet another," resumed Lady Heartley. "'The house of the new prelate, in St. James's Square, is a perfect bijou. His lordship's orders for plate and jewels have caused much astonishment in quarters where it was not known that, previous to his elevation to the episcopal bench, he was one of the richest commoners in England. We understand that his union with the charming Lady Georgina Sourton is to take place within a month.'"

The agitated girl burst into tears. The thought of what must be Burley's feelings crossed her mind, and she wept bitterly.

"My dear Georgina," said her aunt, "pray be calm; there is, I can assure you, nothing so very dreadful in marriage, unless it's an indiscreet one."

"Nothing," added her mother.

"At least your acquaintance, Miss Fitzgibbon, does not think so," continued Lady Heartley: "she was married last week to your old friend Burley."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the distracted girl; "I will not believe it. You have discovered my love for Burley, and have taken this unworthy means to ruin him in my esteem. He is not married; he is engaged to me!"

With an air of well-affected commiseration, her mother laid the Gazette before her. It contained the announcement of the marriage of Burley and Miss Fitzgibbon — of course a forgery. Lady Georgina fainted upon reading it, and was at once conveyed to her chamber.

"I fear we have gone too far," said the marchioness, her maternal feelings at last moved by the distress of her only child. "I did not dream that her attachment to Burley was so strong. I must undeceive her. I cannot bear to see her unhappy."

"Don't be weak and foolish," said Lady Heartley.

"She will die."

"Nothing of the kind," resumed the worldly-minded woman; "she evidently believes the well-contrived fabrication of her lover's marriage; and as for breaking her heart, hearts are not made of such brittle materials. No, no, my dear marchioness; hearts may do very well in romance or a play, but such things are out of nature in real life."

"I almost think you are right."

"I am sure I am. I know Georgina's principles well. She will feel it a duty to root out from her heart—you see I feel not the common error, and use the word myself—all regard for Burley; and what means can be so effectual as by marrying another? Her natural pride, too, will assist her. Once married, the discovery of our plot will be of little consequence. She will be resigned to her fate when she knows that it is irremediable."

The weak mother yielded her better feelings to the persuasions of the heartless Lady Heartley, comforting herself that, in the deceit she was practising upon her child, she was performing a parent's duty—securing her a brilliant and wealthy marriage.

The marquis was informed of the success of the plot as regarded the deception of Burley's marriage, which poor Lady Georgina implicitly believed. He congratulated himself upon his foresight in planning it; and, indeed, so confident was he of success, that he returned a written acceptance of the prelate's offer, with an intimation that his daughter was too unwell to receive him for some days, but that he should be happy to see him.

Fitzgerald smiled as he read the invitation. The plea of indisposition did not blind him, but he felt too much interested in the conclusion of the engagement to scan too curiously the means by which it should be achieved, provided that he himself took no active share in it.

Still his mind was not entirely free from anxiety. The remembrance of his early love, and her mysterious loss, pressed heavily upon him; and he could not but observe how different was the passion he had entertained towards the unhappy Ellen, to the interested one which led him to seek the unwilling hand of Lady Georgina.

"Had but my boy been spared," he murmured to himself, "this sacrifice need not have been; but the destiny of my race is in my hands, and, having achieved so much, it would be weakness, cowardice, to falter. I must have an heir to perpetuate my unwon honours, and hand down my name."

Full of this resolution, he gave orders to his numerous and obsequious tradesmen to have his splendid mansion in fit order to receive his bride within a month.

It was an invariable rule with the prelate not to permit any private engagement to interfere with his duty in the House of Peers. The debate on the very evening on which he received the marquis's letter turned on the war then raging, the burdens attendant on which were beginning to be felt by the people. A motion was made unfavourable to the ministry, and the speeches of the opposition were so fierce that the premier more than once mentally counted the number of proxies he had in his pocket; for he felt considerable anxiety for the result. Nor was that anxiety lessened when the Bishop of Tythetail arose to address the house. It was the first time he had spoken, and, with his usual tact, he had chosen the occasion wisely, for he was perfectly master of the subject. The premier's fears were soon allayed by the prelate's throwing the whole weight of his eloquence and research on the side of ministers; and which, from the extent of his information and the accuracy of his details, produced a favourable impression. The hostile motion was negatived.

"Well, my lord," exclaimed the Marquis of Sourton to the minister, as they were leaving the house, "what think you of the bishop's maiden speech? The right sort, I should say—eh?"

"The most brilliant I have heard for many years within these walls," frankly replied the premier.

"And most opportune too; the impression of the house was against you."

"I admit it, marquis."

"I think," said the courtier, with a smile, "you ought to acknowledge your obligation to me for th introduction of such a timely aid. I assure you I look for the garter at least for having recommended him."

"Your expectation, however reasonable, my lord, is, I fear, doomed to disappointment. The debt is already paid."

"How so? I do not understand you, my lord," replied the marqnis.

"I will be candid with you," continued the minister. "There is, unfortunately, a prejudice existing in the royal breast against the name and person of the bishop, which neither his talents nor virtues will ever be able to remove. You cannot conceive the indignation of the king when he found who it was he had elevated to the bench. Nothing but the critical state of the conntry, and the impossibility of a reconciliation with the opposition, prevented an instant dismissal of the entire cabinet."

"Pooh! pooh! my lord," replied the peer. "His majesty must learn to be reasonable. A few more such speeches in this house, and I should like to see the ministry that will refuse my son-in-law that is to be the justice he demands, and which I am convinced he must eventually obtain."

"You mean the reversion of the attainder against his family, and the restoration of the estates?"

"As for the estates," said the marquis, "the prelate does not valne them. Let Greenwich keep the lands; he is quite rich enough to support the dignity; it is the title that he wants."

"It's a bold game," exclaimed the premier; "and, personally, I could wish him snccess; but all his efforts will be vain; and I think, my lord, that you will confess as much when I repeat to you the king's words on learning who he had elevated to the episcopal bench. 'I see his purpose,' he exclaimed, his lower lip turning to that purple hne which indicated with him extreme passion. 'But mark me, my lords, sooner will I resign my crown than grant the reversion of the attainder of the traitorous house of Derwentwater. If ever it should become a qnestion in the cabinet, you have my commands instantly to resign. I will not be insulted by the proposition.'"

"Pooh! my lord; he must be mad."

"Mad!" repeated the minister, thrown completely off his guard by an observation which coincided so nearly with his own suspicions; "have you any reason to suppose that?"

"Who—I?" said the marquis; "not the slightest. I did but use a *façon de parler*. God save the royal wits!—they are sound enough for any thing I know."

The premier trembled to think how nearly he had betrayed himself.

"This resolution," added the speaker, seriously, "is as unjust as it is impolitic, and cannot be kept. His majesty's insane resentment must give way. If the subject should ever be made a qnestion with a popular cabinet—added to which, there is no treason in predicting that the king's life will not last for ever, or that his successors will be more generons to a noble but unfortunate family—trust me, I shall live to see him Earl of Derwentwater, as well as Bishop of Tythetail, yet."

"Never!" said the minister, with a wave of his hand; and the speakers parted at the foot of the staircase of the House of Lords.

As the Marqnis of Sourton was proceeding to his carriage he was met by the rejected Burley, whose distraction at the generally credited intelligence of Lady Georgina's approaching marriage with the bishop could only be equalled by the indignation which he felt at the unworthy manner in which he had been treated. His eyes flashed with unusual excitement, and the noble peer did not feel altogether at his ease. As he approached, he tried with his usual tact, by bowing coolly, to avoid him.

"My lord marquis," exclaimed the young man, with a countenance in which agitation and passion powerfully contended, "will you favour me with a few moments' attention?"

The peer, who was extremely scrupulous in his observance of the ontward forms of society, smiled acquiescence, and leading the way to an unoccnpied committee-room, coolly awaited the remonstrance which conscience whispered him to expect.

"My lord," said the yonng man, "I lately addressed to you a letter on a subject which so intimately concerns my happiness, that you must pardon me if I entreat you to reconsider your answer, which has well nigh driven me to despair."

"Impossible, Mr. Burley," replied the politic peer; "I am no tyrant to force my danghter's affections. In reply to the application you honoured me with, they were consulted — arrangements have since been——"

"I know," interrupted Burley, furiously; "to sacrifice her to that unholy priest. She loves him not, she cannot love him. It is but three months," he added, bitterly, "since your daughter authorised me to make the application you have received."

"And why did you not?" demanded the marquis.

"Because I was a fool, my lord, and suffered a ridiculous pique to interfere between me and my happiness. Had I bnt offered before this serpent obtained snch interest with her father, we had been happy. I felt when first we met that we were born to hate each other."

"And are you so ignorant of the hnman heart, yonng man," demanded his lordship, "as not to know that in proportion as it loves so can it resent? Think you that Lady Georgina has not the spirit of her sex? Did you imagine," he added, in a tone of mockery, so fine that, althongh his hearer felt, he could not resent it, "that my daughter would wait, like some city miss, three months, whilst you made up your mind?"

"That, my lord, might easily be explained, and I am convinced the lovely Georgina would pardon me."

"From indifference to the insnlt, probably," said her father; "bnt you deceive yonrself if yon imagine that her pardon would proceed from any other feeling. She is now wholly and sincerely devoted to another."

"I must see Lady Georgina," exclaimed Burley, determinedly. "I will not permit her to sacrifice her happiness and mine from a mistaken feeling of resentment, or be misled by false representatiens and slander. The late report of my marriage——"

"Whom do you accuse or suspect?" demanded the marquis, haughtily.

"Yen," said the young man; "the marchioness—the bishop—you are all in a plot to ruin our happiness. I must and will see your daughter; from her lips alone will I receive my sentence."

"Certainly, if it is her pleasure to receive you you shall see her, not without."

"Am I permitted to write to her?" demanded Burley, in a voice hoarse with passion. "You will not refuse me, my lord, that last poor satisfaction?"

"No," replied the marquis. "Nay, more—for, despite the reasons I have to feel offended, I feel for your disappointment—I will be the bearer of your letter; and although I doubt the propriety, and am certain of the inutility of so doing, will request Georgina that she answers it."

The apparent fairness and kindness of the proposal disarmed the young man's suspicions, and he said: "Thank you—thank you, my lord, for this favour. I will not detain you long."

Seating himself at the table in the committee-room, Burley wrote a hurried but forcible appeal to the lady, describing his despair and wretchedness since the day when he called and was told by the servant that she was not at home, although he had that moment seen her with the bishop at the window—his jealousy and resentment. He concluded by beseeching her not to blight his happiness and her own, and made an earnest appeal for an interview.

Although the wily marquis had made the offer of being the bearer of Burley's letter, he had no intention of carrying that offer into effect; but he thought it not improbable, if he took the missive himself, it would prevent the young man from seeking other means of conveying one to his daughter—a circumstance he was most anxious to prevent.

As soon as he had concluded it, Burley placed the letter in the hands of the marquis, unsealed.

"Am I at liberty to read the contents?" demanded the father.

"Certainly," said the lover.

The astute man of the world smiled inwardly as his eye ran hastily over the contents, which he found so worded that he could turn them to good account. A plot instantly glanced across his active mind, by which he felt assured he could part the two lovers for ever.

"Where shall the answer be sent?" he demanded.

"To the Earl of Erringcourt's," said Burley, with a sad presentiment of what that answer would be. "Oh! my lord, deal candidly with me," he added, "for my life, I feel, depends upon it."

"Pooh!" said the marquis, as he seated himself in his carriage, internally repeating the young man's parting words, "his life depends upon it! Pooh! A young man never dies from love. I loved in my young days, and doubtless felt as much in despair as he does, although I don't remember it; and yet, thank Heaven, I wear tolerably well. Die for love!" he repeated, as if tickled with the idea. "Ha! ha! ha! It's the last disease that young men die of. Ha! ha! ha!"

And the heartless man of the world, who judged of others by his own callous feelings, laughed, as he rolled home in his luxurious chariot, at the idea of a broken heart.

On recovering from the fainting fit into which the news of Burley's supposed marriage with another had thrown her, Lady Georgina felt as if her heart would burst, and for some time remained silent. Different feelings at last came to her aid; pride, principle, and wounded delicacy in turn asserted their empire in her breast, and after one or two convulsive pangs, she resolved on forgetting the man who had, as she imagined, trifled with her affections and insulted her in the most tender point—her love and self-respect—which few felt more keenly the value of perhaps than herself.

"No" she exclaimed, dashing the tear from her still quivering eyelid, "he shall not have the triumph of knowing that he has broken my heart. The world is now a blank to me; but he shall not know that he has made it so. I will pay back his scorn with scorn."

After another flood of tears and passionate regret, she determined to comply with the wishes of her family, and accept the bishop's offer.

"Of course!" exclaimed her gratified mother, on hearing the intelligence, kissing her pale cheek; "I knew that you would see the propriety of it."

"Such unexceptionable settlements," observed Lady Heartley.

Lady Georgina sickened at the word, and for a few moments remained silent. At length she said:

"One condition, mother, I must positively annex to my acceptance of his lordship's hand."

"And what is that, my love?" demanded the marchioness, with an anxious look.

"That he is informed of my being—having been attached to another!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears.

"Very proper," said her aunt, smiling significantly at her sister.

"Of course, my dear!" replied the marchioness; "I will myself inform his lordship of your childish attachment to Mr. Burley; as a man of the world he will only smile at it."

"It was no childish attachment," observed the still weeping girl, "but one interwoven with my existence. There must be no deception on this point," she added, firmly; "it must be frankly and truly stated to the bishop."

"It shall be done," repeated her mother. "I pledge myself to the fulfilment of your wishes. Do you feel well enough to see your father, my love? Your spirited decision will delight him."

"In a few minutes I will see him. Leave me for the present. I will get rid of this weakness, and see my father in my dressing-room. Leave me but a few moments to myself."

The marchioness and Lady Heartley left the room, when the unhappy, deceived girl knelt by the side of her couch, and prayed long and fervently. In a short time the violence of her grief abated, and with a powerful effort she prepared to meet her father.

"Your decision, my dear Georgina," said the marquis, kissing her as soon as she entered the room, "is worthy of you. It is what I expected from your high principle and womanly pride. We are all called upon," he added, "at some period of our lives, to sacrifice our inclinations and affections on the iron altar of necessity. Determination lessens the evil, and renders it much lighter than we at first imagined."

Lady Georgina wept, for the unusual tone of kindness in which her father spoke affected her.

"Believe me, my dear child," he continued, "it is for your happiness I desire this union. The prelate is a man whose good qualities will daily grow upon you; esteem will ripen into love, whilst contempt for the worthless being who has trifled, cruelly trifled with your feelings, will enable you, if you have not already done so, to obliterate his image from your heart. Never have I beheld a greater instance of the retribution which follows unworthy conduct than in his fate. He is already sensible of the baseness of his conduct and the value of the treasure he has lost. He has solicited that he may throw himself at your feet, and implore your pardon for his falsehood."

"No, no," exclaimed the trembling girl, "I forgive him freely—wish him every happiness—but if you value my reason, father, do not let him approach me."

"Right," said the marquis; "you have decided, Georgina, as I expected; but his supplication must

be answered by yourself. Read his letter, and then answer him."

Lady Georgina read the hurried billet which Burley, in his agony, had penned; and the equivoque of its language, as her father had expected, confirmed her in her error.

As she read it her brow grew alternately crimson and pale, as the rival roses in their hue.

"I know not, my lord," she said, still believing in his supposed marriage, "how to express my astonishment at his presumption; but he shall find that I am no child to break my heart at his infidelity. He would see me—he shall do so; but not until I am the wife of another."

With a firm hand, but trembling heart, she wrote as follows:

"You ask me to forgive you. I am not aware of any crime which you have committed against my happiness to require such a pardon. If, however, you feel otherwise, accept my forgiveness freely. See you I will not; the interview would be humiliating to you, painful to me, and worse than useless in its result. I trust, therefore, that you will perceive that a sense of propriety and justice to the distinguished individual who will soon be my husband alike forbid it. GEORGINA SOURTON."

"Good!—excellent!" exclaimed her father, with a glance of triumph, as he rang the bell for the servant to carry it—"this is spirited—worthy of you. Should he presume to solicit further, it will be time for me to interfere."

The letter was duly sealed, and sent to the unhappy lover.

Immediately on parting with the Marquis of Sourton, Burley went to Lord Erringcourt's, where he waited with the greatest anxiety for the answer to his note from Lady Georgina. Hour after hour passed away, but no reply came; and in proportion to the lapse of time, so did his feelings become excited, till his mind bordered on madness. He paced the room alternately with slow and rapid steps, then sat himself down, burying his face within his hands, and sobbing bitterly—at one moment upbraiding Lady Georgina for her want of faith, and the next condemning himself for entertaining the suspicion that she could act unworthily.

"No," he murmured, "I will not, cannot believe that she has proved faithless; it is some plot contrived by the wily prelate, aided by her worldly-minded family. She is too good, too pure, wantonly to break the heart which beats for her alone."

The anxiously expected reply was at last delivered to him. His hand shook as he broke the seal. His eye ran rapidly and wildly over the note, the cold contents of which completely paralysed him, and he stood motionless for several minutes, his heart and spirit so completely crushed, that his countenance, like his mind, became almost a blank, for it expressed neither anger, surprise, nor disappointment.

When consciousness returned, he again read the note, and the conviction of some cruel plot became still more strengthened in him; for he felt assured that its contents were dictated neither from conviction nor reflection, but from some sudden impulse, engendered in her mind by unworthy means.

With this impression, he determined to take no further steps in the affair, but wrote off that very night to hasten the return of the Earl of Erringcourt from Paris.

CHAPTER XXIII

Her face was of that Eastern mould
Which Israel's daughters bore of old.
A classic head, whose raven hair
Fell o'er a brow like marble fair:
A chiseled nostril, a rich lip,
Sweet as the dew the wild bees sip:

ABOUT three o'clock on the following day, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Orleans were strolling through St. James's Park, attended by Colonel Hamilton, who had now become the constant companion of their wild debaucheries. The walks were crowded; for London was now in the height of the season, and lovely women, rustling in brocade, or coquettishly attired in chintz and muslin, drew respectfully on one side to allow the royal libertines to pass. Many a fair bosom heaved with a voluptuous sigh as the manly form of the prince passed beside it; and many a warm desire in secret breathed.

"By heavens, George," exclaimed the duke, "London would be the paradise of the world, if its women were less prudish! What health, what beauty, and what graceful forms strike you at every turn! Pity they are so cold!"

"I cannot agree with you there," replied his companion; "that very coldness, to me, constitutes their charm. The pleasure is in thawing them. It seems to me like sporting in a farm-yard when the game meets you half way. The excitement in the chase of love lies in the pursuit. What is your opinion, Hamilton?"

"That women, like champagne, your highness," replied the gentleman, who, according to etiquette, was walking a pace or two behind the speakers, "should be well iced; it preserves their flavour better."

The prince smiled graciously; for, like a spoiled child of fortune, he could not bear even his opinions controverted; all who radiated from the point of which he was the centre, were expected to see, hear, and feel exactly as he did.

"You make an excellent courtier, Hamilton," observed the French duke, laughing; "you should have stayed in France; my cousin of Artois must eventually have appreciated a talent such as yours."

There was a slight sneer, perhaps, in the tone in which the observation was made, perceptible beneath the laugh. Hamilton observed it; and he was not of that quiet nature to let it pass unanswered.

"Where so many illustrious flatterers have failed," he replied, bowing at the same time, pointedly, but with profound respect, "it would have been presumptuous in me to have attempted it. It would not have procured me an invitation to La Bagatelle."

This was the name of a favourite chatean which the Count d'Artois had built in an incredibly short space of time, in consequence of a wager with the thoughtless queen, and where he had given a superb *fete* to the royal family, just previous to the duke's departure for England; but from which the donor's cousin of Orleans, despite the most abject flattery and meanness, had been excluded—the infamous, unmanly libels he had written on Marie Antoinette, or caused to be published, being alleged as the excuse.

His highness felt the sarcasm bitterly, but was too politic to show it, for he was well aware that the Prince of Wales was in possession of the story of his disgrace on that occasion.

At this moment a lovely girl of about sixteen crossed

the path, and either from ignorance of the exalted rank of the speakers, or with a design of attracting their attention, paused close beside them, without the usual respectful long drawn curtsey which, in those days of hoops and brocades, saluted royalty whenever it made its appearance in public.

"What a sweet creature!" exclaimed the prince, fixing an eager eye upon her; "by Jove, I have not seen a finer woman since my teens."

"Why yes," drawled the Frenchman, "she is a gorgeous animal—certainly not an Englishwoman."

The young female who had thus excited the attention of the two libertines was indeed one of those Juno-like beauties which, once seen, are long remembered. Her features were of the Italian, or rather the Spanish Jewess mould: eyes and hair like jet, teeth which showed like two rows of orient pearls resting 'twixt coral banks, and a bust which Love might have chosen for his wanton pillow. Although thus striking in her person and alone, there was an air of modesty in her deportment which forbad the idea that she was other than a respectable person. She seemed like a child when ripening into womanhood—unconscious of her opening beauties.

The Prince of Wales was struck with her appearance; he began to tire, at this time, of the eternal blue eyes and flaxen locks of the reigning favourite, although they remained, in latter life, the standard of his taste.

The walk was too public and too frequented to permit of his addressing her.

"Hamilton," he said, in a careless tone, as if about to say one of the most indifferent things in the world.

"Your royal highness," replied the colonel bowing.

"It is too bad to retain you from your pleasures this lovely morning. I remember you have an affair with Grafton, respecting his racer. We can dispense with your attendance."

The gentleman raised his hat, and glanced towards the young girl who had just passed them.

The speaker simply nodded; but that nod, to the accomplished man of the world, was sufficient; he understood the service expected from him, and, like a bloodhound once set upon the scent, prepared to follow the destined victim. Meanwhile the two royal rakes pursued their walk.

Although strongly tempted, his prudence got the better of his desire, and he forbore to accost her. His object was to follow her to her abode—to find the lair of the doe before he started on the chase. He had not long to pursue the track; the female, with that quick step which indicates the desire to avoid recognition or delay, made the best of her way past the glorious old Abbey of St. Peter to one of the quiet old-fashioned streets running in a line with it, and entered a house, the lower part of which was fitted up as a shop. Antique plate, jewels half covered with dust, peeping out of their faded velvet cases, small wooden bowls filled with foreign coins, were to be seen through the dirty windows, which were protected from the attempts of the thief by a net-work of rusty brass; in short, it was one of those miscellaneous repositories so generally kept by the sons of Israel, in which business was occasionally transacted, from the sale of a broken teaspoon to the purchase of a service of family plate. On a plate half green with verdigris and obscured by dirt was the name of Aaron Wolf.

The gallant colonel started as he beheld it, and for awhile seemed embarrassed how to proceed. The name had evidently revived certain unpleasant recollections, and he twice turned upon his heel to go back, when some sudden resolution restrained him.

"So," he muttered, "the rascal has thriven in the world; grown rich, and doubtless respectable, upon his trade in blood and crime. It is impossible he should recollect me. I am half inclined to venture; but it must not be in my present gear," he added; "he has an eye would recognise the bird, had he once seen the egg from which it was hatched. I must moult these gaudy feathers, and go differently to work with him."

With these words he turned a third time on his steps, and made the best of his way back to the park.

"Have you succeeded?" whispered the Prince of Wales, as soon as he beheld him.

"I have, your royal highness," replied the messenger; "she is a Jewess."

"I guessed as much," replied the royal questioner, "from her oriental style of beauty. Orleans has bet me a thousand that I don't possess her within a month. What is your opinion?"

"That your highness will win."

"Of course."

"But I think it will be difficult. She evidently belongs to one of the wealthy families of her tribe. Her father—if the owner of the house to which I dodged her be indeed the father of so splendid a piece of flesh and blood—is rich; he is evidently a money-lender and usurer."

"Egad!" said the prince, laughing, "the acquaintance may be profitable in more ways than one."

"And where," said the Duke of Orleans, carelessly, as if it were one of the most unimportant questions in the world he was asking, "does this pearl of Israel reside?"

Hamilton was too experienced a hand at intrigue to be thrown so easily off his guard. His only answer was a profound bow, which his royal patron perfectly understood.

"A clever fellow," thought the prince to himself; "not to be done."

"A finished intrigner," muttered the Duke of Orleans; "I must cause inquiries to be made respecting his career in France."

That very night a masquerade was given at the Pantheon; but little curiosity, therefore, was excited in the fashionable lodgings in which Colonel Hamilton resided, when at an early hour he sent for a chair, and dressed in a Quaker-like suit of sober grey, with large silver buckles in his shoes, a brown scratch upon his head, and his whole countenance still further disguised by a pair of enormous green spectacles, descended the staircase, and ordered the bearers to take him to the Horse Guards.

"What a strange man the colonel is!" observed the landlord to his better-half. "What can induce him to disfigure himself in that way? A pretty disguise that for a masquerade! The devil would not recognise him! No doubt but he has some intrigue in hand."

The speaker was not far wrong, but he had not the least idea of the nature of his intrigue. He had that very morning encountered his lodger in the park, walking with the Prince of Wales. All suspicion of his station in society of course was out of the question.

The respectable Mr. Aaron Wolf was on the point of closing the shop for the night when the disguised rake made his appearance. He had arrived on foot; for, with his usual caution, he had dismissed the chairman at the Horse Guards, that no clue might be left of his whereabouts.

"Some quiet tradesman who wants a little help," muttered the respectable Mr. Wolf to himself, as he took a synopsis of the appearance of his visitor, "or bankrupt, who wishes to give his creditors no trouble in disposing of his stock." The surmise was not an unnatural one. He frequently received such visitors.

"Vell," he exclaimed, "vat do you vant? Late hours for business!"

"It's never too late for a sensible man to make money," observed the colonel.

"That's a beautiful sentiment," thought the Jew; who, although rich, far beyond what his appearance and station indicated, still continued, with the folly of a miser, to add hoard to hoard of ill-gotten wealth, which he had not the spirit or inclination to enjoy.

"Do you want to buy any thing?" he demanded.

"No," was the quiet reply.

"To sell, then, I suppose? Monies is very scarce, and it's near the Sabbath. I'm very particular about the Sabbath."

For once, at least, the speaker indulged in the truth; he always charged ten per cent. extra for all transactions concluded upon that day, as a salve to his tender conscience. He was too prudent a man to violate the observances of his religion for nothing.

"Nor do I come to sell any thing," said the intruder.

"Vat the devil do you come for, then?" exclaimed the Jew.

"To talk."

"To talk!" repeated Wolf, with a look of disappointment, for he did not very clearly see how he could make much out of a conversation. "Vell, that's curious! come to a respectable tradesman at this time of night to talk! No time to waste; got my books to look over—bills to make up. Come to talk!" he added, with still increasing snappishness; "pretty way of business that! Talk, indeed!"

"The old fool is getting garrulous," thought Hamilton to himself; "I shall have no difficulty in obtaining the information I require, especially as I am prepared to pay for it."

"Some conversations, Mr. Wolf," he observed, "are more profitable than even business transactions; for they require no other capital than knowledge, which I am certain you possess, and those who have sent me are both able and willing to pay for the knowledge they require. There is," added he, "a Bank of England note for fifty pounds; it is yours on condition that you answer me some half-dozen questions."

"Is it a good one?" demanded the old man.

"Examine it yourself."

Aaron did so, and finding that it was the genuine thing, after carefully fastening the door of his shop, he led his visitor into the little dingy back room, which served him at once as office and parlour. The walls were hung with pictures—like every thing in the house, half covered with dust—some of them of considerable value, others smoke-prepared *originals* to be taken at the proprietor's own price, by the numerous dupes for whom he disconnted bills.

"Vell, vat is it?" he demanded, as he threw himself into a huge brocaded chair, and pointed to a similar one to his visitor; "any thing about the Duchess of Gordon's diamonds? haven't seen 'em."

"No," said the colonel, uneasily, for the question was rather an awkward one.

"Lord Smoothly's bills? vouldn't give sixpence in the pound for a thousand."

"No."

"Vat the devil is it then?" he demanded, somewhat impatiently.

"Did you know one George Sedler, who was hanged some sixteen years ago?"

The question took the Jew so completely by surprise that he half started from his chair, and eyed the questioner with a painful expression of curiosity; for the name recalled many a dark transaction which he believed long since buried in oblivion.

"George Sedler!" he exclaimed. "Vell, vell, va do you vant to know about Gipsy George? Not that I ever had any business vith the man—never, never. I am a respectable tradesman, content vith my lawful profits, pay the poor-rates, and go to synagogue. Ask all the neighbours else."

Hamilton saw at once that, unless he could allay the old man's fears, it would be useless to expect any information from him. The agitation into which the question had thrown him was pitiably ludicrous.

"It is not so much about the man himself that I came to inquire, as respecting two children who were committed, between twenty and thirty years ago, to his care. There's money to be made," he added, in a confidential tone, and drawing his chair closer—"money to be made by any one who possesses the key to that affair."

"Is there?" said Aaron, relieved of his terror, and drawing his breath freely. "Vell, vell, I do know something about the birds. Perhaps, after all, we may come to an understanding. Vat do you offer?"

"Fifty pounds, if you will answer me three questions."

"A bargain! Three questions—mind only three." There can't be much harm in that, thought the Jew.

"Who placed the boy they used to call young George under the care of the landlord of the Rising Sun?"

"Vell, I can tell that; for poor Mike, who was hanged with Gipsy George, told me he had dogged him to the Temple. It was lawyer Prim—a most respectable man, worth a deal of monies—have since had many dealings with Mr. Prim."

"Prim," repeated Hamilton to himself—"good; the plot begins to grow interesting. I thought he looked like a rascal when I visited him."

"Vell," said the Jew, who was impatient to gain the fifty pounds, "vat is the second question?"

"What has become of Maybird?" demanded his visitor, in a voice which trembled slightly with emotion.

"Vonderful!" exclaimed the Jew—"more vonderful than all! When his brother, as he called young George, who was a great rascal, fell into bad habits, and was caught picking a nobleman's pocket, Maybird would not split; and a gentry cove took such notice of him, that he adopted him. He is now a Parliament man."

"Burley?" demanded the colonel, a sudden light breaking in upon him.

"The same. Do you know him?"

"I have seen him," said the Jew's visitor, struggling to restrain his emotion, for the intelligence came like a thunder-clap upon him.

He rose from his chair, and paced up and down the room for several minutes before he was master of himself.

"And what is your third question?" demanded the respectable Mr. Aaron Wolf.

"Who were the parents of those two boys?"

"Ah! there you stump me!" said the Jew; "I don't think even Gipsy George himself could have told you that. Lawyer Prim is a prudent man, and tells few secrets. They must have long heads who deal

with him. Moses himself would scarcely be a match for him."

"No trifling with me," said his visitor.

"As I am an honest man, and a fair dealing tradesman, I've told you the truth. Stay—stop," he added, suddenly recollecting himself, "the landlord of the Bear and Crown in the Almonry can perhaps tell you more; he was pot boy in the house at the time. Ask him about a lady who lodged up the court, a coroner's inquest, and a lost child."

"And this is positively all you know?" said Colonel Hamilton, making a mental *nota bene* of the last piece of information he had received.

"All, so help me Abraham."

His visitor rose and threw the note upon the table. The Israelite clutched it eagerly; it was fifty pounds very easily earned; but still he was not satisfied. He fancied that something more was to be made, and he felt like a man who was defrauded of his legitimate share.

"Are you going?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Vill you call again?"

"Perhaps."

"*Won't* you leave your name?"

"Good night!"

With these words the mysterious personage pulled his respectable shovel hat over his brows, stalked through the shop, the door of which he opened himself, and made the best of his way down the street. The Jew, completely puzzled, returned to his easy chair, and was soon lost in a brown study—who and what could the stranger be, who had paid so liberally for the information?

"Vell, vell," said the old man, "time will show. I always thought the thing would come to light. Such fine boys! What a remarkable thing," he suddenly exclaimed, as the idea struck him, "that he never asked what had become of young George—my George, as the gallows birds used to call him. *Perhaps he knows.*"

Colonel Hamilton, or rather young George Sedler—for it would be impossible to keep his identity much longer from our readers, and doubtless they have already suspected it—was so painfully agitated by the intelligence he had received, that instead of proceeding to the masquerade, as he had at first intended, he returned home to reflect not only on the past, but speculate upon the future. The love which he had felt, when a boy, for his young companion, Maybird, to release whom he had voluntarily given himself into the hands of justice, had not been diminished either by time or absence; he longed to grasp him by the hand—to press him to his heart—to congratulate him on his good fortune;—for fallen and degraded, in many respects, as Hamilton really was, he could still rejoice that Maybird had escaped the contaminating ordeal to which he had been exposed.

"How will he receive me?" he muttered to himself. "Perhaps his heart has grown cold with his elevation; and in the pride of his rank he will shrink from his outcast brother—a felon—an adventurer. But should he retain the same old love of childhood, I'll solve the mystery of his birth, even if I rend it from the old lawyer's heart. I have means to work with he would shrink from," he added; "my heart and sinews have been so early tempered, they can bend to any thing."

With these reflections, he once more reached his lodgings.

"Oh, colonel," said his landlady, demurely, "I am glad you are returned. Mine, you know, is a respectable house now, but the first of quality have ever lodged here. I must keep up my good name."

"Your pretty face will do that, madam," replied her lodger, gallantly. "But tell me what is the matter?"

"There is a lady up stairs," said the woman, in a more civil tone.

"A lady!" repeated Hamilton, with surprise. "And her name?"

"Ah! that you doubtless know better than I do. Poor thing! she seems quite country bred, and came in a chair, without even the precaution of a veil or hood. Oh! you men—you men!" she added, shaking her head, "you have terrible things to answer for!"

The young man was quite as much intrigued as his landlady to guess who the stranger could be; but as she was not likely to inform him, he made the best of his way to his bed-room; and after changing his disguise, descended to the apartment, where a fresh surprise awaited him.

Seated on a sofa, sobbing as if her little heart would break, sat the wife of Squire Lucket, the pretty rustic Phyllis.

No sooner did she behold the man who had taken such an ungenerous advantage of her unprotected state, than she sprang from her seat, and threw herself upon his breast, to hide her burning blushes. Conscious that she had a claim to protection, she nestled there like a young bird which had fluttered to its nest. Hamilton was not sorry to receive her; his position was a lonely, isolated one. At his age the heart naturally yearns for something to love and to feel itself beloved. There had been something so piquant altogether in the adventure, that he had frequently regretted he had not retained her with him. That she should voluntarily return to him was beyond his hopes.

"Don't look at me," she sobbed; "don't look at me; you must despise me for my weakness; but I was so wretched, so unhappy at home, and so tormented by Lucket's jealous temper and suspicion, that my heart would have broken had I remained with him. I am a wretched woman!"

The colonel not only assured her that she was welcome to his home, but sealed the assurance with a storm of ardent kisses and tender protestations, which, as Phyllis wished to believe, he had not much trouble to convince her were sincere. When she had in some degree recovered from her confusion, she informed him that, on her return to the country, her husband had been so struck by her altered demeanour and coldness, that his naturally suspicious temper became doubly suspicious; and that, unknown to her, he had written to the Duchess of Peterfield, under pretence of thanking her for the protection he had afforded to his wife on the night of the adventure of Ranelagh; but, in reality, to test from her reply whether she had indeed passed the night under her grace's roof.

"And what made you so melancholy?" demanded the handsome libertine, with a smile.

The simple-minded creature raised her expressive eyes, and fixed them on him with a look which seemed to say: "Can you ask such a question?"

A kiss was his reply.

"And so your husband found out that you had not been at the Duchess of Peterfield's?"

"He did," said Phyllis; "and, oh! the life I led! He stormed, swore, called me names, which, whatever I may now, I did not then, deserve, for I was far

more unfortunate than guilty; so tired out, at last, with his ill-usage, I—I ran away."

"And how did you find me out?"

"I remembered the house in which your *duchess* lived. I saw the woman, and learnt from her your address. I thought perhaps you would enable me to find a situation where I might remain concealed from the ill-usage of my husband, and earn an honest living."

"Certainly, my charmer. I know of one which will just suit you—you shall take possession of the place this very night."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the lady, with a slight, *only a slight*, expression of disappointment.

"You will have a great deal to do."

"I don't care how much," she sighed; "it will keep me from reflection. What is it?"

"Care-keeper to my heart!" said the young fellow, throwing his arms round her yielding form; "and it will be your own fault if ever it escapes you. Think you," he added, "that if my passions hurry me sometimes to the verge of crime, I am vile enough to let heartlessness push me over? I am afraid, however, that for to-night, as your visit was unexpected, your room will not be ready; but you shall have mine."

The lady was silent.

"Of course,' he continued, with a smile, "only for to-night."

"Of course not," she sighed.

It is extraordinary how very long a time the room for Colonel Hamilton's unexpected guest took in getting ready.

On hearing the bell, Mrs. Brown, the landlady, in *propria persona*, bustled into the room.

"Ah, madam, what an unexpected pleasure! Allow me to present Mrs. Colonel Hamilton."

Phyllis looked at him with gratitude. He was determined that she should not have to blush before others whatever she might do before him.

"Indeed!" said the woman, drily.

"As the presence of my wife will occasion some extra trouble, and we shall require an additional chamber for her woman, who will not arrive till to morrow, from this day you will double the charge for your lodgings. They suit me very well, and I should be sorry to leave."

"And I am sure, colonel," interrupted the landlady, smiling, "I should be sorry to lose you. I dare say the dear lady is tired after her journey. Shall I order supper?"

A reply was given in the affirmative, for her lodger had given up all idea of going out again that night; and the landlady seemed perfectly satisfied with the liberality of Colonel Hamilton, and convinced of the high respectability of his lady.

It is astonishing in this world what a little money will do.

In the situation in which Phyllis was placed, it would have been unkind to have left her to the solitude of her own reflections. Her seducer was unremitting in his attentions, and in those nameless little acts of kindness which soothe a woman's heart. Smiles were soon more frequently seen upon her face than tears, and for the first time in her life she felt that she was happy.

The third morning after her arrival, she placed in the colonel's hand a small case; he opened it, and found, to his astonishment, that it contained two thousand pounds in Bank of England notes.

"What is this?" he demanded.

"Your poor wife's fortune," replied Phyllis, with a blush.

"But how did you procure them?"

"They were a portion of my aunt's legacy to me. It had been paid the day before I left home. Lucket, in his temper, refused to receive them, saying, surlily, that he preferred a chaste wife to a rich one."

"The boor!" thought Hamilton.

The idea instantly crossed him that, with half the money which fortune had so opportunely thrown in his way, he might redeem the jewels from the hands of Prim before he proceeded to commence hostilities with him. He had reasons for wishing them once more in his possession.

"Why, Hamilton," said the Prince of Wales, when our hero waited on him on the following morning, "where have you hid yourself these three days?"

"Indisposition, your royal highness."

"Indisposition!" repeated the prince, laughing, "with such a countenance and air! Pooh! I'd bet a thousand pounds there has been a woman in the case."

The colonel smiled. He had no objection to give the speaker an idea that he was a man of gallantry.

"By the bye," continued his highness, "you have called most opportunely. Go for me to that rascal Prim, he will pay you five thousand pounds on my account; bring it to me privately here—I say privately, for were the treasurer of my household to know that I was in the possession of such a sum, I should be dunned to death by bills and remonstrances about starving tradesmen and their numerous families. So away at once, like a good obliging fellow."

"Shall I not require some authority beyond my word?" demanded the colonel.

The prince hastily traced a few lines, and signed them at the bottom, G. P. W., authorising Mr. Prim to pay into the hands of Colonel Hamilton the sum of five thousand pounds, as agreed upon. Armed with this authority, the visitor took his leave.

"Five thousand pounds," said Mr. Prim, eyeing the messenger suspiciously, and then walking to the window to examine the signature of the prince. "Dear me—dear me! Well, it's very singular!"

"What is very singular?" demanded the messenger.

"Nothing—nothing; only——By the bye, Colonel Hamilton, may I ask if your family is in any way connected with the Duchess of Gordon?"

Any other than the party so questioned might have blushed; he, however, replied, with his usual nonchalance, that the lady in question was his aunt.

"Ha!" thought the old lawyer, "she has lent the jewels to the young scapegrace, and given out that they are stolen. I could swear, from the description, that they are the same."

The money was paid, according to the direction of the prince.

"By the bye, I may as well take these jewels," observed the young man, carelessly, taking out the note-case Phyllis had given him, and throwing two bills for five hundred each upon the table. "It is somewhat sooner than you expected me to redeem them, but no matter."

Prim went to his iron safe to search for the diamonds, which, with many a sparkling gem beside them, had been left by their noble owners as security for cash. He placed them on the table. Hamilton breathed freely as soon as he got them in his possession.

"Once more," he whispered to himself, "I can defy the malice of my destiny."

He carefully placed the jewels in his pocket, and, drawing his chair closer to the old man to observe the expression of his countenance, suddenly exclaimed:

"From whom did you receive the child, Mr. Prim, whom six-and-twenty years ago you entrusted to the care of the landlord of the Rising Sun?"

As if struck with a stroke of palsy, the features of the lawyer became instantly livid; the nerves and muscles of his face played and twisted fearfully. Twice he essayed to speak, but something appeared to have risen in his throat; his long bony fingers extended themselves, and then became firmly clenched, and he absolutely gasped for breath. Hamilton felt convinced, not only that the old man possessed the clue, but that there was some fearful mystery, if not crime, connected with the secret of his birth.

"The landlord of the Rising Sun!" faltered the lawyer.

"Ay; one George Sedlor; the same who was hanged at Newgate some sixteen years since for highway robbery."

"And do you suppose," said Prim, "that I ever had any acquaintance with such a character?"

"Yes."

"That I ever had any transactions with such a ruffian?"

"*I know it.*"

There was a pause. The calm, quiet tone in which the replies were made was far more terrible to the guilty man than any vehement asseveration or violent outbreak of passion would have been. He felt that a searching eye was upon him, and although very far from suspecting the right which the speaker had to exact an account of that dark and almost forgotten transaction, he trembled at the sound of his voice. Something whispered him that he had both seen that eye and heard that voice before. The supposition was not an unnatural one, for the colonel bore a strong resemblance in tone and person to his unhappy mother.

"Will you favour me with an answer?" coolly demanded the young man.

"I know not to what child or circumstance you allude. I am a respectable man."

"So are all men—till they are found out."

"Do you mean to insinuate——?"

"I insinuate nothing. I merely ask a simple

question, which you meet by lies and prevarication. Falsehood, Mr. Prim, cannot be the companion of honesty; dissimulation and frankness cannot go hand-in-hand together. Your conduct has awakened suspicions, which those who are interested in the inquiry I am commissioned to make will use every means to satisfy. It is known," he added, "beyond the possibility of denial or doubt, that you not only committed to the care of the ruffian I have named the boy who for many years bore his name, but a second child, happily rescued from infamy by the benevolence of a distinguished nobleman, through whose active friendship he owes his present high position in society."

"And what may that be?" said the lawyer, curiously.

"A seat in the legislature of his country."

The last assertion appeared so wild, so improbable to the hackneyed man of law, who since the execution of his tool, and the possession of the papers he had purchased of the hangman, had never once made a single inquiry respecting the fate of the children he had devoted to the same career of infamy as their repnted father, that he began to draw his breath once more with freedom. Had such been the case, he felt assured that inquiry would have long since been made. It did not strike him that the death of the old woman, and the extreme youth of Maybird at the time, rendered such an inquiry not only improbable, but impossible.

"For a man of the world, Colonel Hamilton, he exclaimed, "you are very easily imposed upon, both here and elsewhere. I am perfectly prepared to vindicate my character. Good morning."

"You will soon have occasion, then, to do so," answered his visitor, who was not deceived by the air of injured innocence with which he spake. Remember there is no shield can ward against the bolts of justice when Providence has launched them. You are an old man. Consult your heart if it were not better for your interests here and hereafter to make atonement for the crimes which, as agent or principal, you have stained your soul with. Retribution delayed is not escaped." With these words the young man bowed haughtily and left the room. The slight clue he had obtained from Mr. Aaron Wolf had determined him to leave nothing unfolded which might lead to the discovery of his birth. His first business, however, was to restore the Duchess of Gordon her diamonds, and then seek an interview with Burley.

The likeness, in person and voice, to the starving widow who so many years before, in that very room, had predicted the hour of retribution, struck Mr. Prim so forcibly that he exclaimed:

"If it were not too improbable for reason to entertain, I should take that young man to be the widow's son. But what connection can there possibly be between this butterfly of fortune—the gallant Colonel Hamilton—the friend and companion of the Prince of Wales, and—pooh! ridiculous!"

Ridiculous as it appeared, still he could not drive the suspicion from his mind, and he sat rocking himself on his office-chair to and fro, muttering to himself, and meditating on the future and the past.

As Hamilton passed through the outward office where James was busily occupied in drawing out bonds for money to be lent at usurious interest to improvident heirs or reckless libertines, who were squandering upon the worthless wanton the dowry of the ill-used wife, a tall, stately-looking man, slightly bent with age, but of remarkably dignified appearance, passed through the office.

For a while they paused and regarded each other as though some indistinct recollection struck them both that they had met before. With a slight bow the stranger passed on to the sanctum of the *respectable, wealthy* lawyer.

The young man's hand was already on the door, when, from a feeling he could not account for, he returned, and, walking up to the desk of the clerk, demanded the name of the gentleman who had so strangely attracted his attention.

"Sir Walter Mowbray," replied the man, drily, without raising his eyes from his desk.

"And who is Sir Walter Mowbray?"

James looked up, and regarded the speaker with a glance which seemed to say, "Who the devil can you be, to ask such a question as that?" For to him the baronet was a great man—a very great man. For upwards of forty years he and his worthy master had received the rents of his vast estates, and lent out money for him at interest. He knew that he was rich; and riches, in the eyes of the miserable earthworm, were honour, greatness, virtue, and respectability. James could not conceive there was such a thing as vice apart from poverty. There are thousands like him.

"Who is he?" he repeated. "Why he has an estate in Devonshire worth twelve thousand a year; another in Suffolk, which has been in his family since the Conquest, worth more than half the sum, and not a penny, not even a farthing of mortgage upon them; besides half a million," he added, dwelling complacently upon the sum, "in the funds, or lent out at use."

"I ask you, who is he?" replied the colonel; "not how much is he worth."

"I have already told you—Sir Walter Mowbray," said the man.

"Do you know nothing of him, more than his name?"

"In an office like ours we know nothing of any man beyond his name and rent-roll—it's not our business."

Hamilton, whose curiosity was thus unaccountably raised, saw that, to gratify it, he must question the speaker categorically. Drawing his purse from his pocket, he slipped a couple of guineas into the long bony fingers of the clerk, who clutched them like a hawk. It was some time since such a douceur had fallen in his way; for since his master had left off sharp practice, gone to church and grown respectable, he paid his services much less liberally than before.

"Now, answer me," he said; "is he married?"

"No—a widower."

"Has he any children?"

"One son, who will inherit all his wealth."

"Only one?"

"Humph! why there was another," replied James, lowering his voice to a whisper, and looking uneasily towards the door; "but he has been dead many years."

"Unmarried?" continued the visitor, anxiously.

"I know nothing about his having been married. If you want any information on that subject, you had better ask my master; he knows more of the family than I do. Besides," he added, "I don't see what interest it can be to you or me to gossip about other people's affairs. For so young a gentleman, you are very curious."

"Perhaps," observed Hamilton, "I may make it worth your while to gossip a little longer with me If you are candid, you may make those two guineas a hundred—perhaps more. Do you know any thing

of a child, whom your master, five or six-and-twenty years ago, consigned to the care of a fellow named Sedler, who was afterwards hanged?"

"*Which child?*" said the man, who could scarcely utter the words for astonishment.

"You do know, then?" eagerly exclaimed the colonel.

James was silent.

"Remember," he continued, "two hundred guineas,—more, five hundred, a thousand, if you give such information, as I doubt not you have the power to do."

The clerk paused. The sum, to his avaricious soul, was a temptation which would have induced him to give evidence against his own brother; besides, he hated his master, hated him for his wealth, envied him for his success in heaping up piles of the yellow dross he so devoutly worshipped. Further, a thousand pounds would exactly double his capital: at present he possessed but one, and that he had saved out of his salary of sixty pounds a year: to be sure he had his perquisites.

"Hush!" he whispered; "perhaps I do know something on the subject you name; but this is neither the time nor place to speak of it. Mr. Prim may surprise us; he has an ear like a lynx, and is ten times more suspicious than a fox. If you are serious in what you offer, meet me to night."

"Where?"

"At my lodging in Wood Street: No. 11, on the left-hand side. I am well known there; you have only to ask for Mr. James—every one knows me, from the beggar at the corner to the porter of the inn."

"I will not fail you."

"Away at once, then," added the clerk, hastily; for he heard the creaking of a chair in the inner office, as if some one had risen from it, and was about to leave the room; "we can talk better of it there."

Hamilton took the hint, and left the place before Sir Walter Mowbray, in a state of extreme agitation, passed from the lawyer's chambers to his carriage.

"I am sure he is a villain," murmured the young man, as he gazed upon his convulsed features from behind one of the pillars at the bottom of Pump Court; "something whispers me that my destiny is somehow mixed with his."

On his arrival home his first care was to unset the jewels, which he placed carefully, one by one, in a case he had bought for the purpose. The following night the Duchess of Gordon, no less to her surprise than pleasure, received her lost gems. They had been left in a parcel by an old man, who stated that he had brought them from the north. Still she could not help wondering why they were unset.

Our readers doubtless have not forgotten the questions Prim had asked the colonel touching his relationship with her grace. He knew how vindictive an old rascal he had to deal with, and consequently he determined to unset the diamonds before he restored them, so as to render detection impossible, in the event of the old lawyer's suspicions being excited.

On the following morning the young man, whose character contained a large amount of evil as well as natural good, directed his steps towards the residence of Burley—the boy whom he had loved in innocence and childhood—to save whom he had voluntarily given himself up to justice, and received the only brand which, in England at least, had been recorded against his name. The heart of the strong man trembled as he approached the mansion. Twice did he ask himself—how would his friend receive him? Memory had touched one of those slender chords which generally slumber in the breast during the excitement of manhood's career of passion and ambition, till accident awakes them, when they respond with the half-forgotten melodies of youth, and the heart's recollections.

Poor Burley was hourly expecting the arrival of the Earl of Erringcourt, to whom he had written on the receipt of Lady Georgina's letter, and was ill prepared to receive visitors, when Colonel Hamilton was announced. His first impulse was to decline seeing him. Curiosity, however, prevailed; and he was admitted.

"May I request to be informed," he said, as soon as his visitor was seated, "to what circumstances I am indebted for the honour of this visit?"

Although the tone in which he spoke was perfectly bland and courteous, its formality cast a damp on the spirits of his visitor, who longed to clasp him by the hand, and once more call him brother.

"You may well suppose, Mr. Burley," he replied, "that they are no ordinary ones, since the slight introduction which took place between us a few days ago at Ranelagh would scarcely justify such a step on my part, however politeness might cause it to be overlooked on yours."

Burley bowed, and listened with that attention which a well-bred man shows to any communication coming from a gentleman, however little it may concern him.

"I must entreat your permission," continued the speaker, "to allude to circumstances you possibly deem the world unacquainted with or wish to be forgotten—your early life."

"My early life!" repeated the young man with a look of astonishment, unmingled, however, with false pride or shame; "what, in the name of heaven, can you possibly know touching my early life?"

"You shall hear," continued the visitor. "Your earliest recollections found you the inmate of a wretched low house in St. George's-in-the-Fields, known by the name of the Rising Sun, and kept by a fellow named Sedler—George Sedler—who was afterwards executed for highway robbery?"

"True."

"After his death you resided with his widow in Bishop's Walk?"

Burley nodded assent; for he was too much surprised to trust himself to speak.

"You had a young companion—a worthless, madheaded fellow, a few years older than yourself, who passed as your brother?"

"You mean George?" exclaimed Burley.

"Ay," replied the colonel, in a voice which slightly faltered from emotion, "I believe they did call him George, after the ruffian who passed as his father; for, like yourself, the boy was the victim of the crime of others."

The speaker paused, naturally expecting that Burley would make some reply to him; but the latter was so absorbed in the recollections which the conversation had awakened that he remained silent—indeed, scarcely conscious of the presence of his visitor.

"But perhaps I am wrong," continued Hamilton, in a bitter tone, "to speak of one whom doubtless you have long since forgotten; he was a heartless, worthless scamp, and convicted of some petty theft."

"Sir," said Burley, starting angrily from his seat, "I know not by what means you have obtained the

knowledge of my history, or the secret motive of your visit here; but not one word against that misled, unfortunate, yet noble-hearted boy, who gave himself into the hands of justice only to rescue me. True, I had no participation in the act; but still I might have have been detained, and my name branded," he added, with a shudder, "as ——"

"As George Sadler's was?"

"True," said the young man; "poor—poor George!"

His visitor could endure no more; his feelings prompted him at once to reveal himself. Fixing his eyes upon the being he had in early life considered as a brother, he gave a sharp, peculiar whistle.

Burley turned pale as death; it had been the signal, when a boy, of George's calling to him to let him in when he returned late from one of his nocturnal excursions.

"God!" exclaimed the young man, "what am I to understand?"

"Maybird!"

That name revealed all; in an instant the long-separated brothers in misfortune, the victims of another's crime, were locked in a close embrace. Hamilton—the reckless, brave, but guilty Hamilton—cried like a child; he felt as if he was polluting the shrine of holiness by his presence. Never before had he felt so bitterly the humiliation and degradation of guilt.

"Maybird," he sobbed, still calling him by his old familiar name, "this weakness will soon be over; but it is long, very long, since the voice of any one I loved made music to my ear, or spoke to my heart. It was foolish of me to come here; nor would I have done so, had not the hope of serving you seemed to me an excuse."

"Excuse!" repeated Burley, reproachfully; "where on earth should you find a home or a friend, if not with me? Come, George," he added, "this doubt of yourself as well as me is morbid and unkind. Brothers in adversity, shall we be less so in prosperity?"

"Prosperity!" repeated the unhappy man; "oh, yes, I am very prosperous!"

"The friend and companion of the Prince of Wales."

"Who trembles," whispered Hamilton, "lest some voice should whisper in his ear that the man whom he has honoured at his table—been seen arm-in arm with in the Mall—the companion of Sheridan, Fox, Moore, and many of the master-spirits of the age—is a recorded felon—a thing stained with the prison-brand. There are scars," he added, "time may efface or hide—the prison's, never!"

There was a mournful silence for several moments. No one felt the bitter truth of the speaker's words more strongly than Burley. He knew, from observation and a study of mankind, how indelible indeed was the stain which the brand of Justice leaves, and at that moment he felt a hundred times more gratitude and affection to his guardian, who had rescued him from a similar fate, than he had ever entertained before.

"Do not despair," he whispered, soothingly. "Your misfortunes are known to myself alone. Your past life has, I trust, redeemed, since then, your early error."

"Added to it!" exclaimed the wretched Hamilton; "added to it! When cast from prison at the expiration of my punishment, I fell into the hands of the villain who first tempted me—the notorious Aaron Wolf—and advanced from petty theft to housebreaking; from that he tempted me to murder."

"Not to murder!" almost shrieked the agitated Burley. "Do not say to murder! Tell me not that the brother I have so long mourned, loved through our long years of separation, who shared my childhood's pleasures—for we had our moments of pleasure, George, wretched as was our condition—has ever steeped his hands in the blood of a fellow creature!"

"No," replied Hamilton, firmly; "that reproach, at least, is spared me. Think you, had I been so degraded, I had ever made myself known to you? I said tempted, not committed. Whatever crimes I have to answer for, the undying one of blood is not upon my soul! I resisted—quarrelled with the villain—struck, and fled from him. Since then I was for years a wanderer in France, and by a lucky accident attracted the notice of the Count d'Artois, who enrolled me in his guards. There I obtained the little education which removes me from the brute. There I was first taught to feel that honour was something more than a name. The storm which shakes that unhappy country to the centre, the outcry against foreigners in the service of the princes, raised by the infuriated Parisians, caused me, and many like me, to be dismissed; but I left the land of my adoption," he added, proudly, "without a stain upon my name. The school I have frequented might not have been the best in the world, but at least it was a kind one."

"And since your return?" demanded Burley.

"I have been tempted, sorely tempted; but, thank Heaven, have passed the trial, if not scathless in soul, at least in positive guilt!"

He uttered this conscious that in restoring the duchess her diamonds he had atoned, as far as possible, for the crime of purloining them, and that he was safe from the consequences of that dishonourable act.

"Thank Heaven!" said his friend, fervently, "thank Heaven! The rest may be forgotten or repented of. Oh, George!" he added, "it was an evil hour in which you listened to the suggestions of that bad man Wolf. Most likely the aged ruffian, long ere this, has been called before the tribunal of the God he has offended, to render his account."

"You mistake—he lives."

"Lives!"

"More—I have seen and spoken with him."

"Spoken with him!" repeated Burley, with a look of horror.

"Fear not," resumed the colonel; "he could not recognise me. From him I learnt a secret which touches us both nearly—that we were placed under the care of Sadler by a rascally old lawyer named Prim. The hope of being useful to you, Maybird," he added, "of restoring you to your rights, of which I have every reason to believe you have been deprived, made me determine to intrude myself upon you. I felt how unworthy—how degraded——"

His brother—for they were brothers in misfortune and affliction, though not in blood—grasped his hand, and would not permit him to finish the humiliating confession. Fallen as he was, he knew the temptations to which he had been exposed—the friendlessness of his youth—the hopelessness of his manhood. His aim was, if possible, to reconcile him to himself; the task, he felt, would be difficult, but not hopeless. Let those who have never fallen, or loved the guilty ones they have been bound to by affection, blame him if they can.

"No, George," he exclaimed; "whatever your errors, mine shall not be the heart to reject you, or

turn, in the pride of the Pharisee, away. My guardian is a good and generous man; his wisdom will, I am sure, give strength to your resolve. But remember this—through good or ill report, prosperity or adversity, our hearts are still the same—Maybird and George are brothers."

It was determined, wisely perhaps, on both sides, that no further proceedings should be taken till the arrival of Lord Erringcourt in England; he was hourly expected, and fortunately arrived that very day.

He listened with mingled pain and astonishment to the news of Georgina's intended marriage with Fitzgerald, and the relation of Hamilton's visit to his ward. Fatigued as he was, he paced the room for a considerable time in silence. The moment he felt had at last arrived to disclose to Burley the secret of his birth, a revelation which he feared would deprive him of the society of the being he had so long looked upon as a son. But the happiness of his ward was at stake, and he was one of those who never tampered with principle or duty.

"The intelligence, my dear boy, has indeed surprised me," he replied; "distressed me—selfishly, perhaps, for it compels me to reveal a secret which I have hitherto studiously confined to my own breast; a secret which, if I judge the prelate rightly, will change his resolution, and make him as anxious to promote your happiness as he has hitherto been—unconsciously, I trust—to mar it."

"Curse him!" exclaimed the young man, impetuously; "curse him for his selfish pride and his ambition! curse him for having blighted the love of two young hearts which never wronged him! May no child be born to him to call him by the name of parent, or if born to him, may he live to prove his bane!"

"Hold!" said the horror-stricken earl, "blaspheme not against nature. Whatever his crime, thy lips, Burley, must be the last to censure him, thy voice the first to defend him."

"Why so, my lord?" demanded the young man, with a look of astonishment.

"He is," resumed the peer, "and nerve your heart and brain alike to hear it—unhappy being, he is your father."

His astonished ward sank upon his knees as though stricken by a thunderbolt—his eyes flashed fire as if he had just received a violent blow upon his temples. The impiety he had inadvertently been guilty of struck him with remorse and terror. Burying his face in his hands, he sobbed aloud, and for awhile his guardian feared his senses would reel under the intelligence.

"Any thing but this!" he passionately replied to his guardian's soothing exhortations; "I could have borne any thing but to know that that bad, ambitious man is my father."

"Still he is thy father," observed the earl, "the author of thy existence—the being whom God and nature alike command thee to honour and love. Let me not feel my lessons thrown away," he added; "his ambition may be a weakness, but it is not necessarily a crime."

"But his desertion of me—his abandonment of my mother? Father—friend!" added the young man, "the stain of my birth, however humiliating to my pride, I might have borne, might have forgotten; but coolly to destine me from infancy to shame, crime—perchance the gibbet—there is the sting!"

Lord Erringcourt was silent. Heartless as he believed Fitzgerald's conduct to have been, it had never struck him in so painful a light before. He felt that it could neither be excused nor forgiven.

"Let this disclosure, which has withered my very heart, remain," said Burley, "a secret between us. I have no wish," he added, taking his guardian's hand, and raising it respectfully to his lips, "to know another father."

"Impossible," replied Lord Erringcourt, gravely; "he must have the choice of atonement."

Gradually the speaker led the young man to consent to see his father, and extorted from him a promise that no natural burst of indignation or passion should induce him to violate the tie between them. Resolved to put an end to the excitement of his ward, he at once ordered his carriage, and, fatigued and travel-worn as he was, drove at once to the magnificent mansion of the prelate.

The preparation for the union of Lady Georgina and the bishop had been hurried on with as much precipitancy as was consistent with the dignity and high rank of the parties. Fitzgerald was too much occupied with the world of politics to devote much attention to his intended bride; nor was the unhappy Georgina sorry to be left alone. But if the personal gallantry of the bridegroom were wanting, he was ably represented by proxy; the marchioness and Lady Heartley were continually sounding his fame and extolling his liberality.

"Why, Georgina," exclaimed her mother, with a feeling of envy, as she opened a case of jewels sent by the reverend bridegroom a few days before the one fixed for her marriage, "you will be the envy of half the peerage. I scarcely know of a duchess who can boast of such a superb display of diamonds!"

"I hate diamonds!" sighed the unhappy girl.

"Hate diamonds!" repeated her aunt; "well, that is extraordinary! But I always said you were an odd girl. Beautiful!" she added, gazing upon them. "Those the Earl of Heartley gave me were not half so beautiful!"

Poor Georgina was silent; for, although, in the conviction of her lover's worthlessness, she had made up her mind to the marriage, its near approach filled her with dismay.

"You are silent, my love," observed the marchioness. "Very natural; marriage is a dreadful ceremony. What with the kneeling, the congratulation of friends, and the officiousness of the bridesmaids, it is trying. Still, the anticipation is worse than the reality."

"I have found it so in most evils," observed Lady Heartley, "and our dear Georgina will soon be convinced of the truth of my observation. We shall soon see her as blooming and beautiful as love and happiness can make her."

"Never!" exclaimed the wretched girl, throwing herself into her mother's arms, and weeping hysterically; "I shall never know happiness again!"

"All brides think so at first," quietly observed her aunt, determined not to understand her; "but the pain of leaving home is soon got over."

"Poor girl!" said the marchioness, moved by her child's agony, her maternal feeling at last aroused; "I fear this sacrifice will be too much for her."

"Pooh!" interrupted her unfeeling sister-in-law, "it is nothing; brides are generally hysterical. I was so, I recollect, myself; and yet you remember how happily I lived with my lord."

The marchioness made no reply; she knew what kind of life the late earl and his lady had led, and she sighed as she thought upon her child.

"It is nothing—it is past!" faltered the victim, successfully struggling to regain her composure. "I am well now—quite well; permit me to retire, dear mother; I need nothing but repose. Should the bishop call before going to the house this evening make my excuses to him." Saying which, she kissed her heartless relatives, and, like a wounded bird, retired to the solitude of her chamber—there to suffer and mourn in silence.

CHAPTER XXIV.

> There can be no fidelity in guilt,
> Or guilt's companionship. Water is not
> More unstable, a hair more strong to bind,
> Than guilt's sworn compacts.

HAMILTON was not unmindful of the appointment he had made with the treacherous clerk of the respectable Mr. Prim. Immediately after leaving Burley, he directed his steps to Wood Street, and had no great difficulty in finding out the lodging of the faithful Mr. James, who, in his philosophical desire to enrich himself, would just as readily have hanged his employer as a stranger. Indeed, every thing considered, the number of times he had perjured himself, the many dirty transactions he had had a finger in to serve him, he had been but poorly paid for his services; besides, his master had lately talked of retiring from business, and his clerk felt that he was too old to procure another place. He looked, therefore, upon the stranger's offer as a sort of god-send, and was prepared to grasp at it. Accordingly, full of this resolution, he heard the firm step of the colonel as he made his way up the narrow, creaking staircase, with a smile of satisfaction.

"Come in!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands, with a grin—"come in, sir. You are welcome to my humble abode; but the poor must be content."

His visitor looked around the wretched apartment, and internally confessed that it merited the designation he had given it. It was one of those old-fashioned panelled chambers such as are still to be found in the neighbouring inns—Clement's and Lyons. Many years had elapsed since the walls had received a coat of paint, or the windows had been cleaned; and the inmate was too economical to be at the expense of a charwoman: he did every thing himself. His threadbare black suit, which was worn only at the office, hung upon a peg behind the door; and he was enveloped in an old dressing gown, picked up at rag-price in the neighbourhood of Holywell Street; where, indeed, Mr. James generally replenished his wardrobe. Not that his purchases were either frequent or expensive; provided they were cheap, he cared little for either the fashion or make of his habiliments.

To complete the wretched appearance of the scene, a single candle was stuck in an old ink bottle; and by way of substitution for a table-cloth, a soiled skin of parchment from the office was spread upon the table.

"You are but poorly lodged here, my friend," said the colonel, as he drew a rickety chair towards the almost empty grate; "surely, with the salary you receive from your employer, you might afford a better shelter than this."

"A pittance, sir, a miserable pittance," replied the old man, "barely sufficient to keep body and soul together; and I have no perquisites now," he added, bitterly. "Mr. Prim has grown moral in his transactions—very. No matter; time was—time was!"

"Then should have been your harvest."

"I was a fool—a weak, good-natured fool—and too easily satisfied; accepted ten pounds for a service where I might have commanded twenty. I should have thought of my old age. Then I was honest, too. I had the fate of Peter Laws before my eyes."

"Peter Laws! And who was Peter Laws?"

"My fellow clerk, sir; one who was deeper in Mr. Prim's secrets than any other human being. I have seen him, stern as he was to his dependants, turn pale when he saw that Peter had been drinking. We were sure to have a quiet day then, for he was the champion of us all. To show his power over his employer, he would sometimes request him, or rather command him, to give the clerks a holiday; and we were sure to get it."

"And what was his fate?"

"A sad one—he was starved to death."

"Starved!"

"You shall hear, sir. Mr. Prim had a choice stock of wine in one of the deep cellars under Pump Court; for he was not always the niggardly wretch he is now. Peter used to remain, sometimes late at night, with him; on one occasion, but this is only supposition, he is supposed to have sent him to procure a bottle. I have often heard the old porter, who died of asthma last fall, declare that he saw Peter's master like a cat steal stealthily after him, and return with the key in his hand, but nothing is positively known regarding that matter. The next day and the next passed at the office; still no Peter made his appearance. Mr. Prim expressed at first considerable uneasiness; his eye was restless, and his features nervously twitched whenever he mentioned Peter; but gradually he grew calm; at times absolutely jocose; indeed, during the days the poor wretch must have been dying, we frequently heard his low chuckle from the inner office — a sure indication he was pleased at something."

"But how was the discovery made?"

"Ten days afterwards, three or four gentlemen were invited to dine in chambers; it was an arbitration case they had to settle, and master used to observe on such occasions that a good dinner was the best special pleader. Well, sir, the dinner was served, and the guests ready, when Mr. Prim ordered me to take the key of the cellar from his desk, and bring some wine. I looked and hunted, but no key could I find. Master pretended to join me; of course he was equally unsuccessful. *But he knew where the key was all the time.* As a last resource, the locksmith was sent for to force the door. To our astonishment—for I was ordered to accompany him—we found the key in the lock outside. We entered; and never shall I forget the sight. There lay poor Peter, his face half gnawed off by the rats, which we heard scudding from their disgusting banquet as we entered. An alarm was instantly given, an inquest summoned: the coroner was a friend of Mr. Prim, who has a great partiality for inquests."

"And the verdict?" demanded Hamilton, who saw at once how the affair had been planned and managed by the intriguing lawyer.

"Accidental death. It was *supposed* that Peter, whose drinking propensities were well known, had purloined the key of the cellar. It was *supposed* that he had left it on the outside of the door, which shut with a spring lock; and then it was *supposed* again that a gust of wind had in that close, deep passage—where I never felt a breath of air, and I have trod it a hundred times—caught the door, and closed him in.

You may guess, sir," he added, shuddering at the recollection of the scene when he discovered the body, "the horrors of the rest."

"Poor wretch!"

"Mr. Prim gave him a handsome funeral; all the clerks followed him, for we had a numerous office then, and he attended himself. I shall never forget his quiet smile as the coffin was lowered into the ground; it has made me careful ever since, for you see, sir, it is sometimes dangerous to know too much."

"Fear not," said the visitor; "those who are interested in the inquiry I am about to make are amply able to protect you."

"And to reward me?" inquired the old man, sharply.

"And reward you."

"Well, then, come what may, I am determined to make a clear breast of it; and you may tell those who sent you that I can give the clue to the secret of the birth of both the boys. One is the heir, the legitimate heir, to as proud a name and noble a fortune as any in the country. That is," he added, "if he lives; but most likely he is hung long ere this: that's the end of most of Aaron Wolf's pupils."

Hamilton trembled with agitation and joy at the declaration of the old man, and became more and more convinced, from his naming the notorious Wolf, that he was on the right track at last. "Can it be," he demanded of himself, "that the ruffian was paid to lure me from the path of honesty to perdition? If so, by whom?"

This was a question which lawyer Prim could have best replied to.

Hamilton resolved to do nothing rashly; the most important point he had already achieved—he had discovered the hands which held the clue to his mysterious destiny, and the means by which to unravel it. Before proceeding further in the matter, he felt it would be advisable to consult Maybird, as he still continued to designate Burley.

"There, Mr. James," he said, counting the gold into his eager hand as he spoke, "are five guineas for the present consultation. In a few days you shall hear from me again, when I doubt not but we shall come to terms. Till then be silent—for your own sake."

"As the grave," replied the old man; "although I have known even that babble its secrets forth. Gold has such strange ways of speaking!"

Hamilton stared. There was a depth of reflection in the remark he did not think him capable of; not that it was uttered with any reverence. Gold had for many years been the only god the old clerk either knew or worshipped.

Hamilton returned home to the disconsolate Phyllis, who received him pouningly. He had been absent all day; and the loving thing was as moped as a sick bird. A few kisses, however, soon changed her sorrow into smiles. The rover gave a good account of himself, and knew the way to win a woman's forgiveness, especially a young one's.

CHAPTER XXV.

You think to shame me, and I rise more strong
In the bright armour of integrity.
The judge shall take the place of the accused,
And ancient wrongs be righted.

The same evening on which Colonel Hamilton visited the wretched abode of the clerk in Wood Street, the Bishop of Tythetail was seated in the magnificently furnished library of his new mansion in St. James's Square; he had retired there with the intention of looking over some parliamentary papers, which he required to assist him in a debate, in which he intended to take a share. Indeed, he was already deeply immersed in politics. In hunting over his cabinet the packet which contained the certificate of his marriage with the unfortunate Ellen, and a number of papers which had been left by her brother, fell in his way. Years, many years had elapsed since he had opened them.

Many were the feelings which agitated the heart of the prelate as he gazed upon these records of the past—his cheerless youth, his ardent manhood, and that premature age of the heart, which withers without depriving it of vitality. Had but his son been spared to him, his life would not have been without one verdant spot for memory to rest upon; nor was the doubt, the terrible doubt, of Ellen and her fate the least part of his regret.

"Back, foolish recollections!" he exclaimed; "indulged, they but unman me. If happiness has been denied, the great purpose of my life, at least, is near its achievement. Let me but live to see my name restored, and an heir to inherit it, and I care not how soon the grave receives me; there, at least, I shall find sleep for my aching brain, and rest for my weary heart."

At this moment a servant, much to his astonishment, announced the Earl of Erringcourt.

Fitzgerald's first impulse was to decline seeing him. He felt that through life he had been misjudged by his friend. He was of too proud a nature to explain, for to him confidence and friendship seemed like twin brothers—he could not understand a division in their love. Convinced, however, that whatever the motive of his visit, it was an important one, he resolved to see him.

He was standing by the table when the earl entered the room, and returned his salutation with that cold, stately bow, by which men mark their sense of coldness or injustice.

"Still the same," thought his visitor. "God, what a pity so noble a creature, so gifted, should be heartless!"

It was the recollection of Burley, abandoned, as he believed, to poverty and shame by an unnatural father, which prompted the reflection. Had he known the truth, how deeply would he have deplored his unhappy suspicions, which for so many years had sundered parental and filial love.

"You were surprised, but I trust not displeased, my lord, at my visit. Trust me, nothing but the important nature of the communication I am about to make could have induced me to intrude at such a moment on your privacy."

"I perfectly understand, my lord," coldly replied the prelate, "that our interview is one of necessity, arising from circumstances yet to be explained. It is long, very long, since I could have attributed any other motive to so unlooked-for an honour."

"And whose the fault?" interrupted Erringcourt, moved by the tone of reproach in which the words were uttered. "Friendship seldom survives respect."

"Was it to tell me this you requested to see me?"

"No," replied the friend; "I come to wring your heart, to offer you the power of atonement for that one act, which, if I judge it rightly, preys like a canker-worm upon its happiness; for whatever its errors and weaknesses, honour and humanity cannot so have been stifled by ambition, but that their voice

must at times be heard, especially when the soil in which their seeds were sown was originally good."

"Have you come purposely to insult me?" demanded the prelate, haughtily. "My character and station might have at least preserved me from such treatment. Or does the guardian champion the insolence of his ward?"

Fitzgerald pointed to a letter which Burley, in his despair and anger, had intemperately written him. It contained reproaches for his selfishness and ambition, and accused him of conspiring with the marquis and his lady to blight the happiness of Lady Georgina and himself.

"I do come to speak of that young man," replied the earl; "his virtues, integrity, and heart render him such that a father might well be proud of him."

"Doubtless," said the bishop, sarcastically. "Was it to read me a catalogue of his merits that I have been honoured with this visit?"

"No, Fitzgerald; but to implore you to do him justice."

"Justice!" repeated the astonished man; "in what have I wronged him?"

"Ask your heart," replied Erringcourt, "when I inform you that I rescued him from the sink of infamy and vice to which an unnatural parent had condemned him."

"Did you?" replied his host, who began to think that the wits of his quondam friend were woolgathering.

"I received him from the widow of a wretched criminal, whose life was rendered up to justice,—on George Sedler."

"His connection may probably account for his manners," observed the prelate, drily. "Sedler! Sedler!" he repeated; "surely I have heard that name before! Ah, I remember—the ruffian was hanged for an attempt to rob and murder me some twenty-four years since. And is your ward—Mr. Burley—that very respectable person's son?"

"Fitzgerald!" exclaimed the nobleman, indignant at his coldness, "if no throb of nature beats at your heart—if no sentiment of parental love bids you atone the past, let the memory of the victim of your lawless passions plead for her abandoned child."

The speaker drew from his pocket the miniature of

Fitzgerald, which Bet had discovered round the neck of Burley when a child, and given to his guardian upon her death-bed. The bereaved husband recognised it immediately: it had been his own gift to Ellen; and the sight of it, after so many years, overwhelmed him.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded, greatly agitated.

"It was found round Burley's neck when an infant. You forgot to remove it when you consigned him to the care of the ruffian who was to train him to the gallows."

Overcome by his feelings at the discovery, the bishop sank into his chair. Burley, the man who hated and had insulted him, was then the child he so long had mourned—Ellen's lost child, the first pledge of that solitary love which, like a star, had lit the existence of his youth, and whose sudden disappearance in the horizon of life had left the world a blank.

"Atonement," said his visitor, "is better even than repentance. True, you cannot remove the stigma from his birth, but you can confer happiness by promoting his union with Georgina. He is worthy of your love. I have reared him nobly—worthy of your son. He is prepared to forget the past, and pardon you."

"Pardon me! Forgive!" repeated the agitated parent, who had thus discovered, in perhaps the only man he ever really disliked, the son he so long had mourned. "Truly he has much—much to forgive."

"He has; but his generous nature is capable of all. I have brought him with me. He is impatient to confirm the pardon your ears thirst to hear. Shall I admit him?"

"A moment—a moment," said the prelate, hastily swallowing a glass of water; after which, by a violent effort, he recovered his composure. "Now—now I am ready."

Erringcourt was astonished at the stern air he assumed, but deeming it an effort to recover his self-possession, he hesitated no longer. Throwing open the door of the library, he admitted his ward into the presence of his father.

Burley was pale as the marble table against which the bishop was slightly leaning, but haughty and erect. He entered the room more with the air of a man who had been deeply injured than that of a son eager to embrace his new-found parent.

No sooner did Fitzgerald perceive the look of reproachful restraint with which his son approached him, than his firmness and self-possession returned. He fancied that he read in it the aversion with which his guardian friend had filled his heart against him, and he felt bitterly the injustice he had received even at the moment when, despite the feelings circumstances had engendered between them, his heart yearned to bless, his arms to enfold him.

"And is this the way you have taught a son to approach his father?" he demanded, directing a cold inquiring glance at Lord Erringcourt; "but filial duty, obedience, and respect, are too trivial virtues to enter into your philosophic scheme. The pupil doubtless is worthy of such a master."

The peer and his ward were dumbfounded. At the moment when they expected to find the unnatural parent, as they deemed him, overwhelmed with confusion and remorse, he stood erect before them, calm in the dignity of conscious integrity, and questioning them more like a judge than a criminal. Erringcourt cast a look upon Burley, which seemed to entreat his forbearance, and remind him that the speaker was his parent. His pupil understood him.

"My lord," he murmured, with a violent effort at self-command, "if there is little affection in my manner, it is that till this hour I knew not the claim which you possessed upon my duty. If I am wanting in respect, it is, perchance, that my memory retains the sense of injury, although my heart has pardoned it."

"Injury!" repeated the astonished prelate, thinking that he alluded to the affair with Lady Georgina. "Unnatural boy! let not the hour which should prove the happiest of my existence—the sole oasis in life's barren desert, be blighted by thy churlish humours! Where is the joy that should gladden in thine eye—the voice which should whisper in thine heart—the knee which should be bent to ask a father's blessing? Away!" he added, "lest the lips which God hath consecrated for benediction breathe a curse—a father's curse—on thy rebellious head."

"I cannot fear the curse which Heaven would shudder to hear! Farewell, my father," continued the young man, deeply agitated, but firmly repressing his temper. "I shall not again intrude upon your presence; but if the hour should come when my mother's wrongs shall awaken remorse in thy stern ambitious nature—when her shame, her broken heart and ill-requited love shall whisper to thy conscience—send for the son you have left without a name; he will return and pardon thee."

The speaker turned upon his heel, and was about to quit the library, when the voice of his father repeating his words. "Without a name!" recalled him.

"Ay," added Burley, bitterly, "the bastard has neither name nor heritage; in all he is an outcast, even in hope."

"Bastard!" repeated the indignant prelate. "Who taught thy lips that lie? The tutor who reared thee to insult thy father, and blaspheme thy mother's memory? Bastard!" he again repeated, bitterly. "Shame, Digby! shame! Was it not enough, in the hour of youthful friendship, to insult its confidence by cold suspicion of my unsullied honour; but thou must steal the heart of my son from me, blacken my life to my own child, and slander the spotless purity of his mother?"

"God!" exclaimed Lord Erringcourt, deeply agitated, for a new light suddenly broke in upon him, "have I been deceived? Were you and Ellen married?"

The only reply of his ill-used friend was to point to the certificate lying on the table. Burley snatched and read it with a faltering tongue: a flash of joy glanced from his proud eye as he perused the proof that he was no longer a nameless thing, but held an honourable position amongst men, and this drop of gall at least was washed from his heart. But if legitimate, as he undoubtedly was, the question which naturally presented itself was, why had his father abandoned him, or worse, consigned him to a life of obscurity and infamy?

"Fitzgerald," said Digby, for in the agitation of the interview they frequently addressed each other by the names of former years, "scale after scale seems falling from my sight, and I, who deemed myself secure in virtue's path, awake and find myself upon a precipice. If Burley is, as indeed these papers prove, really your legitimate offspring, why did you consign him to the care of a felon and a murderer—a fellow whose trade it was to train youth to the gibbet?"

The glance of horror and indignation which the bishop directed towards the speaker appalled both him and Burley. Had the fearful mystery never been solved, that look would have been in the memory of both a refutation. The heart of the young man began to swell within his bosom, and he felt as if he could have sacrificed his life to prove his parent worthy of being loved.

"And thou hast deemed me capable of this?" replied Fitzgerald, scornfully. "Condemned unheard, unquestioned, the man who exchanged his thought with thee—whose heart was open as thy nature has ever been narrowed by doubts, and jealous, mean suspicions."

"I saved him from the villain when a child," said Erringcourt.

"He was stolen from me when a child,—he and his mother deluded from the home where trusting love had left them. Vainly I sought, waited, hoped, and trusted that God would restore them to me. Hence my lonely life—my resignation of the world—scorn of the wealth which chance had given to me; while the rich fountain of parental love o'erflowed in barren grief—while my very soul was solitude. You knew I had a son; you hid the light of my existence, withheld him from me, and trained him—infamy and shame upon thy head!—to hate his father."

Lord Erringcourt was indeed overwhelmed and confounded. The penitent he came to pardon rose an accusing judge before him; and Burley, in whom the voice of nature, so long tongue-tied, spake with powerful eloquence, sank upon his knees and wept like a child at the feet of the parent he had so cruelly judged and wronged.

"God! I am punished," he exclaimed; "pardon! pardon!"

"Begone!" said the prelate, sternly; "my name and wealth are secured to thee. Thou canst pass the poor addition of a father's love."

"Mercy!" continued the young man, grasping his hand, which Fitzgerald vainly attempted to draw from him, for he was weak as a child from emotion; "oh! did you know how I have pined to hear some kind voice call me son—to be clasped in the embrace of a parent whom I could love and honour, you would not cast me from you!"

"Go!" said his parent, faintly; "my name is yours already; my wealth will follow it soon," he added —"soon, very soon."

"Father, I renounce them both," said the young man, frantically; "they would prove a curse, and not a blessing, unless accompanied by parental love. Let my mother's memory plead—consider my youth and my estrangement—the fatal error into which I have been led. Could you," he added, "thrust from your heart the child of your early love—the being whose care should be your staff in age?—condemn him to a life of misery as cheerless as your own?"

All the speaker's haughty indifference, his air of pride, and conscious injury were gone. His cheek was pale, as his large blue eyes, which on their first meeting had struck him from their resemblance to his Ellen's, were fixed in humble, tearful supplication upon his. Pride, anger, wounded honour, all gave way at the appeal of memory and nature. With a trembling hand he raised him to his breast, and wept over him even as Jacob wept over his recovered child. Erringcourt, humbled and reproved, quitted the room. He stood convicted, to himself, of injustice to the man whose friendship he slighted—whose character he had so wrongly judged.

Kneeling by the side of his father's chair, Burley poured forth his regrets, his feelings, and his hopes. The system upon which he had been educated, although right in principle, had been carried to an extreme. Erringcourt, truly as he loved his ward, had not quite supplied a father's place. Nature whispered that there was a void within his heart which not even his guardian's cares could fill. Day had already dawned when the father and son separated. Not one word respecting Lady Georgina had been mentioned; yet, strange to say, Burley's heart felt almost at ease.

When they met the next day, both were more calm—the calm had followed the tempest; and they consulted on the fitting means to trace the mystery which still hung over the past.

"I must write to my lawyer," said his lordship. "Although old, he is a man of unbroken energy and perseverance. We must endeavour to discover the name of the ruffian who first placed you with the wretch whom you were taught to call your father."

"That is already known," replied the young man. And he related to him his interview with Hamilton, whom he described with the boyish feelings of former affection and former years — his trials, temptations, weakness, and repentance.

"He too," observed his father, "seems to have been the victim, like yourself, of some malignant destiny. You say the same man placed you both with this villain Sedler?"

"The same."

"And his name?" demanded the bishop.

"Prim—a wealthy lawyer and money-lender, in the Temple."

"Prim!" repeated his father—"Prim! I have heard that name before. Gracious God!" he suddenly exclaimed, as the recollection of how he had become familiar with the name struck upon him. "Should it be—but no, no—it is too terrible!"

"What?—who, my lord?" said the young man, surprised at the change which came over the speaker's countenance; "have you ever met this man?"

"Never, thank Heaven, never."

He rose hastily from his seat, and advanced to a cabinet, the same from whence he had taken the packet which contained the certificate of his marriage, and eagerly sought for a small bundle of papers. After some delay he found them; they were labelled "Private: to be opened after my death only by Fitzgerald or my sister."

The writing was in the well-known character of Ellen's brother, the curate, who had given the church's sanction to their love. Immediately after his death his brother-in-law had made himself acquainted with their contents, but carefully kept the secret they contained from the knowledge of his wife, fearing to distress her: happily she had died without attaining it. Years—many years had elapsed since he had last perused them.

The prelate was too much agitated to remove the faded black ribbon which confined them; he was compelled to give them into the hands of his son to open them.

The first document which presented itself was a certificate of marriage between Nicholas Prim and Arabella Wilmot. It was dated half a century back. Burley read it aloud.

"The same! it is the same!" murmured his father. "Heaven, how wondrous are thy ways! Yet what could have been his motive? Unnatural, fearful man!"

"My lord!"

"Heed me not, but continue your examination. I shall soon gain strength enough to explain the cause of my agitation; but these trials are too much for me—they are killing me," he added.

Burley looked into the speaker's face, and saw indeed that he was wonderfully changed; his features had become contracted, as though a spasm had seized him.

"You are ill, father," he affectionately exclaimed; "let me send for your physician."

"I have no time for illness when the mystery of your mother's fate, and an act which deprived me of both wife and child, are on the point of being solved. Gerald," he added—our readers will remember that such was the name by which Burley had been christened—"our trials are not yet past; we have another blow in store; but continue with the papers."

The next documents were the registers of the birth of three children, by the names of Edward, Ellen, and Rachel Prim. The young man stared, for Ellen was the name of his mother.

"Read no more—that is sufficient," said the prelate. "I know the rest—all that is essential for our purpose. You must write to this Nicholas Prim, requesting him to wait upon me this evening, and a second note to the Marquis of Sourton."

At the last name the lover blushed to his very temples, and his heart beat high with hope.

The notes written, it was decided that Burley should meet Colonel Hamilton, and accompany him to the low public-house in the Almonry which Aaron Wolf had indicated, still further to pursue their inquiries, and trace the last clue to the dark mystery which hung over their births.

On crossing through the park, on his way from St. James's Square, the young man encountered Hamilton, who was on his way to meet him. The latter observed that the features of his friend, usually so calm, presented traces of sorrow and agitation, which the few hours' rest he had indulged in had been unable to subdue.

"Maybird!" he exclaimed, "what has happened?"

"I have found my father, George."

"And has that distressed you?" demanded the colonel. "Heaven knows that I would give ten years of my life to grasp the hand of mine—to feel I have one being in the world bound to me by the tie of blood—a father whom I could love as well as honour. Ah, Maybird!" he added, "in all things Fortune smiles on you!"

"Less, perhaps, than you suppose," replied his friend; alluding, in his own mind, to the distress which the discovery had occasioned to his guardian, and the scene between him and his father; "even my happiness is not without alloy."

"What! is he not kind to you?"

"More than I deserve."

"I see, I see," said the man of the world; "the victim of a heartless, inconsiderate passion ——"

"Not so, George," interrupted his companion, proudly; "my birth is legitimate; I am an only son; the Bishop of Tythetail is my father."

"What! he who so cleverly hoodwinked the ministry touching his birth, when they raised him to the bench?"

"The same."

"Happy Maybird! you have indeed a parent to respect; he is one of the master-minds of the age. I heard Sheridan, at table a few days since, declare that the bishop was the redeeming light in the House of Lords—a man no less commanding from his intellect than the dignity of his manner."

"And yet the king hates him."

"Pooh! he is mad!" replied his friend; "and we shall one day have a regent or a revolution."

These random words were prompted by the hints and incautious words let fall in the prince's circle, where the oddity and obstinacy of the king were frequently the themes of comment and discussion.

By this time the young man had reached the Almonry, and, without much difficulty, found out the Crown and Bear, the house where the inquest upon the unfortunate Mrs. Mowbray had been held. The landlord—a short, fat, bustling little fellow—was busily occupied behind the bar serving his ragged customers. One or two soldiers were lingering by the door, one of them a thin, grey-haired sergeant, who was evidently on the recruiting station, was smoking his pipe, and descanting on the pleasures and prospects of a military life to a simple-looking country boy, who eyed his red coat and listened to his fine speeches with open admiration. When they entered, one of the speaker's comrades frequently addressed him as Corporal White.

"Are you the landlord of the house?" demanded Burley.

"At your service, gentlemen," wheezed the fat landlord; "what can I do for you?—private room up stairs?"

"It is not your room so much as your society that we require; can you not accommodate us with a bottle of claret within the bar?"

This was so unusual an order that it made the host of the Crown and Bear stare. He certainly had such a thing as a bottle of claret in his house—one having been left there after a parish dinner which he had had the honour of serving, and which formed an epoch in his public life. The low hatch which divided the sanctum from the profane was graciously opened, and the two swells respectfully invited to a seat inside—an honour seldom conferred upon any but the parish clerk, and the exciseman when he made his monthly visits—for there are secrets in all trades. The solitary bottle of wine was uncorked, and the landlord about to retire, when Hamilton requested him to remain and take a glass with them.

"I wish," thought the little man, as he eyed the embroidered coats of his guests, "that the overseer would step in now, great man as he is."

The wish was not an unnatural one: we are all ambitious of being seen in good society, and many are weak enough to pay for the privilege instead of earning it.

"I wish to put a few questions to you, landlord," said Hamilton, "respecting a lady and child who, five-and-twenty years since, were known to you. But first let me ask you, are you acquainted with Mr. Prim?"

"The lawyer?" demanded the astonished landlord.

A nod of assent was the response.

"I thought so," exclaimed the man, slapping his short fat thigh; for the name of Prim brought the whole affair to his recollection. "I have often said to my missus that murder would out."

"Murder!" repeated the young men, with a look of horror.

"Oh! I don't mean right-down, earnest murder, such as men are hanged for: those who had to do in the affair were too wide awake for that. But still, it was no less a crime in the sight of God; for they stole her baby, and starved its mother.

"Starved!" exclaimed Hamilton, and he felt a sickening sensation at his heart; "what am I about to hear?"

"Somewhere near the time you mention," continued the man, "a lady—for she was a right-down, earnest lady—took the room over the loft in the back court. Master—for I was not landlord then—had the letting of it, as the whole row belongs to the same man. Of course, neighbour-like, every body was anxious to know who and what the poor lady and her baby were; but she was either too ill or too proud to gossip, and they soon left off tormenting her. She was a discreet lady, gentlemen," added the man, "and knew how to choose her friends. She and I soon became quite confidential."

"Did she, then, reveal to you her name?" inquired Burley, with an air of surprise.

"No, no—she never told me her name; but I several times took letters for her to Mr. Prim, at his chambers in the Temple, and was to have brought back money; but I never did. The old rascal, although I told him over and over again that she was half starved, never sent her a shilling. So, piece by piece, I sold trinkets and dresses for her; till at last, in the depth of winter, she had nothing left but her faded velvet cloak and the gown she stood upright in. Sad thing! for I am sure she was a lady."

"Did no one ever visit her?"

"No one but old Prim, or a lean, hungry fellow they called his clerk, who used to come hopping about the place just as my old raven does about the house of a person who is about to die. Well, gentlemen, one morning—and a bitter morning it was, I shall never forget it—the poor creature was found dead in her lonely room. But the strangest thing of all was, that her baby, who could not walk the day before, had run away."

"Run away!" repeated Hamilton, who was deeply interested.

"Ay," said the man, with a knowing wink, "or ran away with. A crowner's quest was held in this very house; Mr. Prim managed all that. The verdict, of course, was 'accidental death'—no questions asked—no witnesses; the doctor was in a hurry, and the jury wanted to go home to mind their business. So they buried the poor thing, and there was an end of the matter."

The colonel, unable longer to restrain his emotion, leant upon the table and wept bitterly. Burley laid his hand upon his shoulder, and affectionately whispered a few words of consolation. The landlord, who, from their appearance, first fancied that the questions they had asked were the result of mere idle curiosity, felt assured that one at least of his guests had a dearer interest in unravelling the matter, and in the heat of his imagination already saw himself the observed of all in a court of justice, giving his evidence before those big-wigged terrible gentlemen in scarlet and ermine whom he had wondered at so often in Westminster when a boy, and entertained an indistinct kind of terror of as a man.

"Did you know the lady?" he inquired.

Know her!" exclaimed Hamilton, starting from the table, and discovering his handsome countenance suffused with tears; "too little to remember, but sufficient to avenge thee, mother!"

"Mother!" repeated the host, scarcely daring to believe the evidence of his senses; "mother! Well, well, who would think that the poor lady's lost child would turn up at last? But I said he would, I said he would.

And the little man rubbed his hands with glee. Here was a theme of conversation for the neighbourhood, and he the only person who could explain the affair! He mentally calculated on a full parlour every night for a month at least, and, with a little management, doubted not but the excitement might be kept up much longer.

"Caution!" whispered Burley to his companion; "restrain yourself."

At this moment the voice of the sergeant was heard calling lustily at the bar for another pot of ale and a screw of tobacco. This sound seemed to produce the effect of an electric shock on the nerves of the landlord. Kicking open the hatch, he rushed to the front of the bar, seized the speaker by the arm, and, much to the amusement and surprise of the loungers, dragged him into the sanctum where the friends were sitting.

"Joe is mad—certainly mad," said a respectable greengrocer, who had dropped in. "Something has knocked him off his pins. What can be the matter?"

"I know," grinned a second. "The excise is down. Two of the officers dressed as swell coves *is* in the bar."

Joe's lean and much better half—at least as far as the government of the establishment went—was no less astonished than the rest at her husband's unaccountable behaviour. She had stood the invasion of her peculiar territory with wonderful equanimity, considering that during the conversation the door had been provokingly shut. Perhaps the unusual order of a bottle of wine had mollified her; but this last act was so extraordinary, that woman's patience and curiosity could stand it no longer. Turning the key in the till, she told her son—a miniature resemblance of his father—to look to the bar, and sallied in after them, her cheeks flushed with anger. She felt that she had been neglected, and was determined to exact the respect due to the executive in all well-regulated governments.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen. What is the matter? Has any thing occurred to upset the little sense in my poor husband's head? Who ever saw a decent landlord in his senses rush and drag people about in that way?"

"Silence, woman," said Joe; "we are clearing up a mystery."

"Silence!" said the wife, scarcely trusting the evidence of her ears; for, as she afterwards observed, during the twenty years they had been married, her husband never hinted at such a word before. "Well, things are come to a pass when a man's lawful wife is bid to hold her tongue!"

In an instant the landlord was sensible of his error, and hastily informed her of the discovery of the poor lady's lost son, and the inquiries which had been made—the sergeant all the while standing by, and as much astonished as herself "And now, my dear, I trust you are satisfied?" he added, apologetically.

"Quite. And now," said his better half, "you can go and mind the bar: I know all the rest, and can explain it much better to these gentlemen than you can."

"But, my love," remonstrated the crestfallen little man, who saw his importance thus unceremoniously eclipsed by his better-half, who was remorselessly resolved to snuff him out, "permit me to——"

A look from the matrimonial telegraph, the landlady's eyes, stopped his tongue. Habit rendered obedience natural to him. He obeyed, but vented his indignation in slamming the door in a manner

which his wife gave him cause to remember in many a curtain lecture afterwards.

"And now, gentlemen," she continued, finding that she had the ground clear to herself, "I'll explain to you why that poor silly husband of mine dragged in the sergeant, who, knowing what a weak vessel he is, will be kind enough to excuse it. Heaven only knows what I have to put up with; but as I was saying, I will explain every thing to you. My husband would have kept you a week over it, he is so fond of hearing himself talk. I will not detain you a second. I've heard Joe tell the story a hundred times, so I can't be mistaken."

Here the good woman paused, absolutely for want of breath. The two friends looked at each other with an air of resignation. They felt that it was of no use to interrupt her.

"The very night the lady died, her baby was found lying exposed, in the bitter cold air, on a bench in the park, by a sergeant who was making his rounds; and White's wife here nursed it."

"That she did," said the man, who saw at once the clue to their conversation, which at first had been carried on in hieroglyphics to him; "and grieved enough she was when the poor old grandfather and mother came to claim it; it nearly broke her heart —she had just lost her own boy, and it seemed like parting with him a second time. But I should know him," he added, "if ever we meet again."

"How," demanded Hamilton, starting from his chair, "would you recognise him?"

"By a little mark I put upon him just above the wrist. I learnt the trick of doing it in the marines, and both my wife and I thought it might be prudent; for his clothes, though ragged, were trimmed with the finest lace."

"Was the mark you placed upon the boy," demanded the colonel, at the same time baring his wrist, "any thing like this one?"

The old soldier gazed upon the sign for a few moments with surprise—it was indeed the same.

"I could swear to it!" he exclaimed; "Sergeant Gourlay held your hand, and it was a tiny one; then, while I made the mark and rubbed the gunpowder in. You bore it bravely, sir, and scarcely winced. How my poor wife," he added, "would have rejoiced had she but lived to see this day! A hundred times she has spoken of you, and blamed your grandfather for not keeping faith with us. He promised that we should hear how you got on in the world; but he never kept his word."

"He was a villain, my honest fellow," replied Hamilton, "sent to take me from the hands of those who would have protected my infant years—an impostor—a cheat. I have yet to learn whether I have a grandfather, or, indeed, a relative. My life is perhaps doomed to be as lonely as it has hitherto been unfortunate."

"Would I had known it!" said the honest fellow, clenching his broad fist; "would I had known it! I would have brought him to a drum-head very quickly, the old rascal! To think how he wept too!"

"The tears of the crocodile, my good man," observed Burley.

"But your honour has served?" continued the sergeant, eyeing Hamilton with that professional air which long service gives; "I observed the same thing when you entered."

"I *have* served," answered the young man, with a sigh.

"In what regiment? How proud the old troop would have been of you! I hope it was the forty-fifth. It ought," he added emphatically, "to have been the forty-fifth!"

"In the service of the King of France." added the colonel.

The old sergeant received the intelligence with an air of dissatisfied surprise. The idea of an Englishman serving in a foreign regiment seemed downright treason to his own lawful king and country, who, in his ideas, were entitled to the thew and muscle of every fine tall fellow whom nature had provided with a pair of broad shoulders, or fitted to carry a musket; but he kept his thoughts to himself, inwardly muttering, "More's the pity! more's the pity!"

One piece of triumph was reserved to the disconsolate landlord: he alone knew the humble grave where the remains of the unhappy mother rested. Our readers may remember that he had planted his solitary rose-tree upon the spot. After rewarding the parties with a liberality which far exceeded their expectations, and exacting from them a promise of silence, the young men were conducted by Joe to the neighbouring churchyard; and, after pointing out the humble mound, Joe returned, leaving the son to indulge his grief unobserved over the ashes of his mother. Burley sauntered to a distance, for he felt that there was a sorrow too sacred even for his friendship to obtrude its offices upon.

Hamilton remembered that, when a boy, he had often played with Maybird upon the very spot—trod the sacred earth with careless feet, unconscious that they profaned the resting-place of the author of his being; and tears, bitter tears of regret, were mingled with those which affection caused to stain his manly cheek. Deeply did he reproach himself for his past life—the black scars which crime had left upon his not wholly corrupted nature; for that heart is never entirely depraved which throbs with emotion at the name of mother, or is sensible to the ennobling feelings of friendship and generosity. He felt like a criminal called upon to answer his misdeeds while kneeling by those awful ashes; his mother's spirit seemed to interrogate him and judge him. In his repentance and remorse he thought not that her gentle spirit, cleansed from human weakness, judged not as earthly beings judge — who see the crime, but never the temptation.

"Had I but been permitted," he murmured, "to know and love you—to listen to the holy influence of a mother's counsel—to feel the ties of home on my wayward nature, surely I had not fallen. Mother," he added, "forgive the son who has dishonoured thee —for whom thy life, perchance, was sacrificed—and pray, pray in thy abode of bliss, that when the last trumpet calls earth's scattered dust together, thou mayst stand in joyful spirit before the judgment-seat, and say, 'Thanks, Lord! the child thou gavest is here with thee."

There is no influence so soothing to the mind and heart as the balm which religion pours upon the wounds which the world has made. Beneath its healing spirit the passion and grief of the speaker gradually became calm; and when Burley advanced and touched him on the shoulder, to intimate that it was time they should depart, he arose from his knees a better and a wiser man.

"Come," said his friend, "it is time to seek my father; his counsels best can serve us now."

His companion shuddered at the idea of presenting himself in his present state of mind before an honourable man, whose sacred office, more than his rank and

worldly reputation, awed him. He hesitated—his friend guessed the cause.

"*He knows all*, George," he whispered. "At the moment of my reunion with my father I showed my whole heart to him,—its weakness, strength, friendship, and—no, not love," he added, with a melancholy smile; "he knew that secret long before."

"Yes, I will go," replied the young man. "Humility is the first fruit of repentance. Ah, Maybird," he added, calling him by his old familiar name, "your parent may well be proud of you; but mine, even should he live, must own a felon for his son. God!" he added, "that the sins of youth should rise against us in our age!"

Burley hastily led him from the spot; he feared a further outbreak of sorrow and remorse, and he endeavoured, by talking of their early days and future prospects, to cheer the spirit so humbled and so bruised.

About the same hour that the young men made their visit to the public-house in the Almonry, Mr. Prim was seated, as usual, in his office. He had just closed a very profitable transaction, and was counting the large sum he had received over and over again, with a sort of lingering fondness, ere he deposited it in his strong box. There was a gentle tap at the door.

"Come in," cried the lawyer.

James ushered in a servant in plain purple livery. It was the messenger of the Bishop of Tythetail.

"Certainly," said the old man, after he had perused the note; "I shall be most honoured to attend his lordship. He may rely upon my being punctual. Bless my soul," he added, after the clerk and man had left the room—"a bishop! Well, well—I shall have the king himself, I suppose, coming to borrow money next. But I must have good security—nothing without security. I wonder if his see is a rich one."

After carefully depositing his treasure in his strong box, the idea struck him that he would make inquiries into the revenues of the prelate, who, he doubted not, sought to become his debtor, and stepped across the court to the chambers of a friend, who, from being the lawyer to the chapter of St. Paul's, was well versed in ecclesiastical affairs. The gentleman informed him that the bishopric was not worth more than four thousand a-year—probably not so much.

"Four thousand a year!" muttered Prim, with an air of disappointment, as he hobbled back, for he was now a very old man. "Poor affair—poor affair! He must insure his life, or not a penny from me—not a single penny."

Full of which resolution, the lawyer returned to his chambers, and busily occupied himself with his accounts till the appointed time.

That day the prelate received two visitors—the first was the Marquis of Sourton, who hasted down the moment he received his note, and remained closeted in the library more than three hours with him. What passed at this interview can only be guessed from the fact that the very same day the marchioness and Lady Georgina, much to the astonishment of their friends, left town for their country seat; and it was observed that the poor girl smiled as she entered the carriage; it was the first which had been seen on her countenance since her quarrel with Burley and the intelligence of his supposed marriage. Some good-natured friends made their usual kind remarks upon her unexpected departure; others hinted, and some whispered, that the match was broken off; not that the rumour was believed, for her father and affianced bridegroom appeared in public more frequently than ever.

Fitzgerald's second visitor was the respectable Mr. Prim the lawyer. He received him alone, after giving strict orders to the groom of the chamber not to admit even his son till the visitor was gone, unless, indeed, he rang to request his presence.

"Humph!" thought Prim, as he surveyed the magnificent mansion of the supposed borrower; "no wonder he wants money. Here's a mansion for a man with only four thousand a year! Why he ought to have twenty at the very least to keep it up. So many lazy vermin of servants too—leeches that are continually sucking. Poor affair—I shall be very short with him."

For a borrower the bishop received his visitor very coolly. Without rising from his seat, he quietly pointed to a chair, an act of courtesy due to the old man's age, and ordered the servant who had ushered him in to close the door.

"You are welcome, Mr. Prim," he said, gravely; "although the subject of our conference will prove of painful interest to us both."

At the word *interest* the lawyer pricked up his ears. It began, he thought, to look like business. By the term *painful interest* he thought the speaker alluded to the per-centage which fools who want money pay to knaves who lend it.

"Ah, my lord," he sighed, "there is no business to be transacted now-a-days without interest, and a security too," he added—"real, good, tangible security."

He thought it as well to give his lordship a hint that nothing in the shape of personal security would be accepted.

"I spoke not of vulgar material interests," observed his lordship, "but those which concern the heart's happiness—the mind's repose—the peace of an ulcerated conscience."

"I think, my lord, it was to consult with me on money matters," replied the old man sharply, for he began to suspect that the speaker was either mad, or judged him to be so.

"Money!" repeated the bishop; "dross! vile dross! I have too much to trouble me already."

Prim stared; he had met many strange characters in his time, but a man who complained that he had too much money was a being perfectly beyond his comprehension.

"Your lordship does not want to borrow, then?"

"Not a shilling!" replied Fitzgerald, with a smile.

"Wants to get a donation for some church or chapel," thought Prim to himself; "he has heard that I am rich. Not a penny—not a penny, if he were to preach till doomsday."

With this mental resolution not to be humbugged, the old man quietly awaited till it should please the owner of the stately mansion to explain himself.

"Your name, I think, is Nicholas Prim?"

Nicholas nodded assent

"Formerly of Gloucester?"

"Yes, yes," hesitatingly replied the lawyer; for, although it was many years since he had resided there, the question had awakened many painful recollections.

"Where you married, some fifty years since, a lady named Arabella Wilmot?"

The old man turned very pale; but unable to lie while the searching eye of his questioner was fixed upon him, he stammered an answer in the affirmative.

"By whom you had three children — Edward, Rachel, and Ellen?" continued his lordship, whose voice slightly faltered as he pronounced the last well-remembered and deeply-cherished name.

"I had."

"Both wife and children left your home more than forty years ago; since when you have never heard of their existence?"

"Never."

"What was the reason of their abandoning you?"

"The reason? You push me closely, my lord. Who can find a reason for a faithless woman's conduct? Whatever my failings, temper, errors, I dearly loved that woman. Old as I am, her memory haunts me still."

"Shall I tell you the reason?" said the bishop, sternly. "She abandoned you because she found the stain of blood was on your soul—the blood of her only brother—to inherit whose miserable pittance you caused him, under pretence of insanity, to be confined in a madhouse, where suicide completed what cruelty and avarice began."

Despite his nerve and self-possession, Prim was overwhelmed at the fearful accusation, every word of which conscience whispered to him was true. Since he had grown old, he was haunted by hideous dreams; and at times he doubted whether even in this life the avenging bolt would not overtake him. How the speaker became possessed of this terrible secret was a mystery he had yet to learn. Gradually, however, he recovered his firmness, and, with an air intended to express injured innocence, replied to the unexpected accusation.

"The character of fifty years, my lord, is not to be blighted by idle suspicions; my respectability is the best guarantee that I am injured as well as insulted by them. That my brother-in-law died in the way you alluded to is well known; equally so that I inherited what you have aptly described as a miserable pittance. The smallness of his fortune is the best proof that I obtained it legitimately."

"*Legally*," interrupted the bishop, "would have been a better word. Temptations are great or small according to the character and means of those who are tempted. Usury and crime had not then filled your hand to overflowing; the temple was not furnished by your idol—gold. I can perfectly understand that *now* such an inducement would scarcely move you."

"But my children, my lord!" said the stricken parent. "Whatever you may think of me, at least I have a human heart; and often in my solitude, in my busy pursuits of life, have felt that I should be happier could I once more behold them. In mercy, tell me where I may once more find them. I have wealth to leave them," he added—"the means to place them on a level with the great ones of the earth; ay, even I would not die like a leafless tree, and leave no shoot behind me."

"Your son—your good and virtuous son, expired in these arms. It was from him that I inherited the papers which explained the cause of his mother's abandonment of her home and husband, and justified her to her children. As a wife, it was impossible that she could justify herself to the world. Her plea would have been your condemnation."

A deep groan escaped from the parched lips of the fearful man, whose manhood had been but one scene of crime, and whose age was doomed to be as cheerless as unhonoured.

"But my girls?" he faltered; "they at least still live?"

"The eldest," resumed the prelate, "married, not wisely perchance, and has never since been heard of; for, directly after her union, her brother and sister quitted that part of the country where they then resided for Cambridge, where your son was ordained, lead a brief career of usefulness, and died. All that is known is, that her husband's name was Mowbray."

The lawyer started from his chair with a shriek so harrowing, so full of despair and horror, that even the strong nerves of the speaker were shaken. The hair of the guilty father bristled over his clammy brow, and his eyes dilated and flashed with the burning agony with which those words consumed him. Compared to what he suffered, madness would have been mercy; but God, in His anger, refused him even the consolation of insanity.

"Not Mowbray!" he gasped; "not Mowbray!—any name but that—the vilest—the most degraded—and I will kneel as I bless you. Spurn me—I am a wretch! trample on me, I will not resist! spit upon me, and I thank you! but oh! if you have one drop of pity in your nature, say that it was not Mowbray!"

"Walter Mowbray!" slowly repeated Fitzgerald.

"There is a God then!" shrieked the horrified father, who found that he had starved his own child, watched with unpitying eye her face grow thinner, sold her to her enemy, led the midnight murderer to her wretched abode, and consigned her child to a life of infamy. "There is a God," he replied, "and His red bolt hath stricken me. Death, madness, annihilation—any hell but memory—but memory!"

"Your second child, Ellen," continued the bishop, in a voice broken by emotion, "married a young clergyman named Fitzgerald. His grandfather was a proud, stern man, and it was deemed wisest to keep their amour secret. He left his home of love and happiness to visit London. On his return, the light which made earth a paradise was absent. His wife had been deluded from home by the machinations of some fiend who personated his aged relative, Richard Radcliff."

"Good!" shouted Prim, with a wild cry; "good! How Satan must have laughed when he beheld me! Both dead! — both gone!—destroyed by their unnatural father! Kill me," he added, casting himself in frenzy on the floor; "trample my life out! Dead! How shall I meet them at the eternal bar? Rachel and Ellen, with their reproachful eyes, demanding their children at my hand!—their very glance will damn me!"

"Blaspheme not, wretched man," said his accuser; "there is mercy yet for repentance."

"Repentance!—as easily might I wash out the stains of a corrupted world as hope to cleanse my heart by penitence. Night is not more black—hell more foul, than its corruption. See!" he added, pointing wildly round the room, "how the fiends grin at me, their mocking eyes flashing in fierce derision! They want to catch my soul. No, no—not yet, not yet—one task is left me yet, and then I am their own!"

Fitzgerald, who gathered from his ravings that he had unknowingly been the destroyer of both his children, despite his own wrongs, felt almost disposed to pity him. It was a fearful sight to witness—an aged man raving with all the fury and vehemence of youth—the volcano of human passion bursting from the snows of years in lightnings and in flames.

"Some atonement may yet be made. I have discovered my son."

"Your son!" repeated Prim.

"Ay, mine and Ellen's; for I am the husband so bereaved—the father so long deprived of his paternal rights. I know that you placed him in the hands of the wretched man Sedler—the same who was afterwards hanged for an attempt upon my life. His cousin, if I err not, shared his fate."

"I know, I know; both doomed to the gallows! and by me!—by me!"

"Both have escaped the life of infamy to which you had devoted them. My boy—poor Ellen's boy—bears a name unsullied; and his cousin (for such I suspect to be the tie between the men who so long held themselves as brothers), though fallen, is not lost."

"Thank God! thank—no," groaned the lawyer; "I dare not thank Him, lest I should remind Him of my sins, and His just wrath consume me ere my task is finished."

"Ellen?" impatiently demanded Fitzgerald. "Feel for my agony, for the suspense and the long doubt of years."

"Dead!" replied the old man, coldly; for the intensity of suffering had almost rendered him insensible to its pangs. "Dead! all dead! I murdered her!"

His hearer sank into his chair speechless with surprise and horror.

"Murdered her—not like a cut-throat," continued the usurer. "No, no; the devil was too cunning to permit me to do that. I drove her to distraction; lured her from her home; and at the instigation of a villain, and for gold—gold, which will one day be poured molten on my heart—sold my own flesh and blood!"

"To dishonour?"

"No, to death! She escaped from him. I see her now as she fell through the treacherous skylight; her fair form crushed, and the blood pouring from her half-closed mouth and nostrils. I have seen it often in my dreams; I shall see it through all eternity."

"Monster!" exclaimed the agitated husband; "heartless monster!"

"Hush! there were two of us—Moreton and I. Hell and lust were in his heart, the thirst of gold in mine. Let me go home," he added, faintly—"home.

I shall be able to think there. Here there is blood upon the ground—Ellen's blood. Here I shall grow mad—mad!"

"Moreton," repeated Fitzgerald, too much absorbed in his own sorrows to heed the ravings of the guilty man, whose senses were evidently unsettled by the shock he had received. "Well might he quail when his eye met mine; he felt his victim still had an avenger. My hand is powerless, but her son—my son—yet lives to drag his crimes to justice."

Outraged as he had been, and deeply as he despised the character of his unhappy father in law, the prelate could not permit an aged man like Mr. Prim, in such a state, to leave his house alone. He therefore ordered his carriage, and requested his chaplain to conduct him to his chambers. The only answer he could obtain from him to any further questions was the repetition of the word "Home—home."

In this state of apathy he remained till they led him to the door. No sooner did he behold the coach than he became violent, declared that he would not be conveyed to Newgate, and, breaking from the arm of the servant who led him, fled with the fleetness of a younger man across the square, and made the best of his way into the park. It was not the first time he had prowled there at night. It was the scene of many of his crimes.

As the maniac rushed along, a thousand hideous phantoms seemed to pursue him. Turn which way he would, pale faces followed him, and beseeching eyes were fixed on his. The wind, too, whispered, or seemed to do so, the cry of "Bread—bread for your starving child!" Then he thought of Rachel, as he last beheld her; her flushed cheek and large lustrous eyes fixed reproachfully upon him. Next would come a bleeding mother and her helpless child, her delicate form crushed and mangled; and a crash like broken glass, and a rattling framework, rustled in his ears. The solitary passengers, who turned to watch his hurried step, deemed him some madman escaped from his confinement, and almost fancied they could catch the clink of his fractured chain. After roaming for several hours in this distracted state through the park, the wretched man seated himself upon the very bench where, six-and-twenty years before, he had exposed his infant grandson. The keen night breeze had cooled his burning brow and fevered cheek; his reeling brain gradually became calm; and he sat moodily pondering on the past, or terribly deciding for the future.

His mind at last seemed made up. He rose from his seat, and, with a quick, determined pace, made the best of his way to the Temple, mounted the stairs with his usual precise step, and locked himself in; and, strange to say, had no sooner thrown himself upon his couch than he slept soundly; for in proportion to the wildness of the storm of human passion by which we are agitated is the prostration of the energies which invariably succeeds.

On the following morning he rose at his usual hour; although his complexion had assumed a tallowy hue, and his eyes looked red and bloodshot, his demeanour was calm and collected as ever. A young nobleman, to whom he was that day to have advanced a large sum upon usurious interest, sent his steward to wait upon him to fix the hour for sealing and delivery.

"I have altered my mind," said Prim, as soon as he heard the message. "I don't intend to lend any more money."

"Not lend!" replied the disappointed messenger; "why I thought you had promised. My lord relies upon it. He has directed several of his tradesmen to wait upon him for their accounts, and ordered Madame a diamond necklace."

Madame, as she was generally called, was the French mistress of the dissipated young spendthrift.

"The strumpet must do without it, as far as I am concerned," replied the lawyer, coldly. "I am not one of those who change their resolutions. It is no trickster's turn to squeeze, as I have done a thousand times from spendthrift minors and expectant heirs, a greater interest. I have closed the book of usury," he added, "for ever."

Scarcely was the disappointed servant out of the room than Prim rang for his clerk, and the convenient James, the ready witness, the tool fit for any crime, whose lack of physical conrage alone prevented his being, if possible, a greater villain than his master, entered the room. He was much struck by the alteration in the old man's countenance. To him he seemed death-stricken; but he was too well trained to offer any observation, and waited as usual till his master should speak.

"Make up your books, James," said Mr. Prim, quietly and calmly. "After this day I shall have no further occasion for your services. Don't interrupt me," he continued, seeing that the astonished clerk was about to reply. "The salary you have hitherto received shall be continued to you for life on one condition."

"Ah, sir!" exclaimed the avaricious wretch, to whom the unexpected liberality of his old master was little less than miraculous, "I always said that you were a good man!"

"You lied, then!" interrupted the lawyer, sternly; "for you knew that I was a villain!"

"Yours," continued the canting hypocrite, "is true piety. You can't bear to hear yourself praised. God bless you!"

"Rascal! another such a word, and not a penny—not a farthing. Thinkst thou," he added, "that I part with my hard-earned gold to purchase the praise of an earthworm like thee—a thing that wouldst worship even Satan himself, were he only seated on a throne of that base yellow metal which is thy god—thy past and future?"

James was silent, no less from astonishment than prudence. He saw that some sudden change had come over the spirit of his master's dreams, and that in heart he was an altered man. Without a word he resumed his place in the outer office, and sedulously devoted himself to his task of making up the books.

A few moments afterwards Mr. Prim, dressed with more than his usual care, passed from his private room, which he carefully locked after him, and with a firm step and unruffled countenance directed his way towards the mansion of the bishop, in St. James's Square.

The father and son, together with Colonel Hamilton, were seated in the library when the lawyer was announced. Accustomed as Fitzgerald was to read the human heart, and to study character in all its phases, even he was startled at the cool, collected demeanour of his visitor. The only sign of the night of agitation he had passed, and the fearful shock he had received, was an occasional quiver of the lip, or the sudden flash of his quick grey eye, as if a sudden spasm seized him, which lasted for an instant, and then passed away.

"Your son and his cousin, I presume, my lord?"

The prelate bowed assent, and the two young men turned coldly away.

The speaker, in his wretchedness, would have given the world to say "*My grandsons!*"—but even that miserable consolation was denied him As he gazed on the manly forms and intelligent features of the cousins, he felt awaken in his breast a throb of human affection as well as pride, and, in the bitter consciousness that the demonstration of those feelings was denied him, he experienced perhaps the most bitter pang that ever wrung his iron nature; but, like the martyred Indian at the stake, he calmly smiled upon it.

"I have been considering, my lord," he resumed, "the readiest and surest means of proving the birth of your son, and have arrived at the conclusion that Lord Moreton must be indicted for felony."

"Felony!" repeated Burley.

"Felony, young man. The abduction of your mother, by his unworthy agent, and subsequent attempt upon her honour—in defending which she lost her life—bring him completely within the statute Sir Richard Burns, the police magistrate at Bow Street, is about the fittest person to receive the depositions. The first step will be to obtain warrants against the aged housekeeper and her husband, who still reside at the old manor-house near Charlton; their evidence once obtained, the rest will then be easy."

"You forget," observed Fitzgerald, "that the principal agent in the affair——"

"Will be there," interrupted Prim, "and give his evidence voluntarily. Without him the case would be incomplete.—For you, young sir," he added, turning to Hamilton, whose likeness to his mother nearly upset his firmness, "the proceedings will be less tedious, since I possess not only the certificate of your mother's marriage, but can myself identify you by means of the sergeant who found you in the park the night I so wretchedly exposed you to the mercy of the tempest, and the guardianship of that all-seeing eye, whose glance has at last confounded me."

"Do this," said Burley; "and deeply as you have wronged us, you may merit Hamilton's forgiveness and my own; even my father, who has been the greatest sufferer by your villany, will not withhold his pardon. Will you, my lord?" he added.

"I should ill befit my sacred office did I refuse to accord the forgiveness I daily teach and ask for others," replied the churchman. "Man hath no right to frown upon the sinner whom God hath promised to pardon."

"Speak not of God or pardon," exclaimed Prim, thrown off his balance by the tone of kindness in which his son-in-law spoke; "there is for me no pardon. The stream of mercy, gushing through endless ages, would fail to wash my stains away. Instead of pardon, I have judgment before my eyes. There are voices accusing me hourly before His throne, which God must listen to. His justice must condemn me, or the great fiend himself might accuse Him of partial weakness. Speak not of pardon more," he added, with a ghastly smile; "I know my doom, and wait but to accomplish my last earthly task to fulfil it."

The bitter tone of self-accusing conscience in which these few words were uttered proved how deeply, how hopelessly, the speaker felt his crimes, and anticipated their punishment.

"Your lordship's presence before the magistrate will be necessary," continued the lawyer, after a pause.

"Certainly," replied the bishop; "I am ready to attend you."

"The name of the nobleman who rescued your son, my lord, from the widow of the ruffian, whose acts, bad as they were, were spotless compared to mine?"

"The Earl of Erringcourt," replied Burley; for he would not pain his father by compelling him to pronounce his name.

"Then known as the Honourable Mr. Digby?"

"The same."

Prim took out his pocket-book, and made a few memorandums; when he had done, he requested his lordship to name the hour at which he would be ready to accompany him to Bow Street.

Three o'clock was the one named.

"Till then, my lord. I take my leave. My next visit is to Sir Walter Mowbray."

"Sir Walter Mowbray," repeated Hamilton.

"Ay, young man, to your unnatural grandfather. Fear not; I have the power to crush his haughty nature, humble his pride of ancestry, crush him like a bruised viper beneath my feet; and fear not that I will spare him"

"What could have been the cause of his strange abandonment of me?" demanded the colonel.

"That," replied the lawyer, "which damned more souls than even avarice or ambition—pride! Your mother was good, virtuous, fair, but lowly born; and the descendant of the Norman robber, whose estates were obtained by plunder and massacre, felt wroth that his ennobled dust should mingle with untilled clay. So he and I plotted—contrived—till we starved her—starved the widow, who died rather than desert the just rights of her son;—damned ourselves—he for pride, and I for gold."

The conscience-stricken man, overcome by the terrible recollection of the misery he had occasioned, sank exhausted on a chair. Hamilton was as pale as death; his proud eye flashed and his lip quivered. In his indignation he could have crushed the self-accusing wretch who, broken by age and remorse, sat overwhelmed before him, had not his utter state of prostration restrained him.

"Good day, my lord, for the present," said Mr. Prim, rising with a determined effort. "This weakness of the body does not affect my mind. My purpose is as unshaken as my repentance. At three I shall wait on you again to accompany you to the magistrate."

Without trusting himself to cast a second look upon his grandsons, whom he would have given all the wealth he had so wickedly acquired to have pressed but for one moment by the hand, the lawyer walked steadily from the apartment. His next step was to visit Sir Walter Mowbray.

"Think you, my lord, it is well to suffer him to depart alone?" demanded Hamilton.

"Why not?"

"His repentance may cool. His depositions ought, in my opinion, to have first been taken."

"Fear not," said the bishop, mournfully. "He has that upon his heart and brain which will not let him rest till he has made atonement. Show no suspicion, and he will not disappoint your expectation. Even I, whom he has most wronged, can pity him; for I know the depth of his despair—the abyss into which avarice has plunged him."

On his arrival at Sir Walter Mowbray's, Prim found the whole house in confusion, and the old baronet raving like a madman. It was fearful to witness

such a tempest of passion in one so old. Curses flew from his lips; he absolutely foamed with rage; and even the most favoured of his attendants trembled to approach him.

"Thank God you are come!" exclaimed the valet, as soon as he beheld the lawyer. "Long as I have known Sir Walter, I never witnessed a scene like this."

"What! is he dying?" demanded Prim.

"Worse—storming like a madman! He has been on his knees twice already to curse his grandson! Of course you have heard the news?"

"I have heard nothing," said Prim.

"Master Richard," whispered the man, "has married Mademoiselle Mosine, the great dancer, and it has driven his grandfather mad."

"Good!" thought the lawyer, over whose countenance a grim smile passed at the intelligence. "A Jewess!—very good!—his first son's error was light compared to this."

On entering the library he found the baronet pacing up and down the room, with a letter in his hand, a prey to the most violent excitement. His features were rigid with passion, and the expression of his stern eye, as it glanced upon his visitor, was terrible to behold. At that moment, had his degenerate grandson entered the room, the old man would have been capable of sacrificing him to his resentment.

"Prim! good! the very man I wished for! You have courage, and few scruples. You have heard the news of this accursed marriage—this stain upon my blood and honour?"

The lawyer merely bowed his head in token that he had heard it.

'It must be broken," continued the old man, "though at the expense of half my fortune—nay, if it leaves me a beggar! Mosine—a dancer—a thing that lives by distorting her limbs for the amusement of gaping idiots or licentious boys! A toy, a very mushroom of humanity! A Jewess," he added, with a deep groan, "grafted on my ancient stock!"

"Singular!" said the visitor, drily, "especially in the lady, considering that your crest is a boar's head! But how long has she left Lord Simple's? It is not a fortnight since I advanced the young spendthrift a thousand pounds to purchase a diamond necklace for her."

Sir Walter replied only by a deep groan.

"She must be rich," continued Prim; "the settlement I drew for her when the Marquis of Heartley took her into keeping was twelve hundred a year; that and her annuity from Sir Thomas, and the money she made out of the prince, would be no bad fortune, Sir Walter, even for the heir of a baronetcy; and your grandson——"

"Villain!" said the old man, driven frantic at the enumeration of the various dupes his daughter-in-law had made, and the list of her paramours; "sooner would I see the idiot dead—and his dishonoured life with my own hand—than suffer this pollution."

"Her diamonds are magnificent," continued the lawyer; "she will make a splendid appearance as Lady Mowbray."

Prevent that," whispered the baronet, "and name any sum you please—half my fortune—and I will sit a gainer by the loss—only prevent that thing of infamy from being Lady Mowbray."

I came for that very purpose, Sir Walter."

But how—how is it to be accomplished? The marriage was celebrated before so many witnesses that it is impossible to conceal it; besides, it is already in the papers. My shame," he added, "is the gossip of every table and coterie in London."

"By acknowledging the offspring of your dead son the legitimate heir of your title and fortune; by atoning for a crime long since committed, and never yet repented of."

"Never," doggedly replied the baronet.

"Then I will," said the lawyer, coolly.

"You!" repeated Sir Walter; "you, a thing whom I could crush! you dispute my will in this? Have you forgotten, Mr. Prim, the act of incendiarism by which you destroyed the books of the village church where the disobedient boy and wretched girl were married?"

"No."

"Or the forgery by which you prevented the woman from claiming her pension as an officer's widow—the deed of assignment by which he transferred his commission for a consideration never paid, and which transfer he never signed?"

"No," repeated the lawyer, unmoved by the enumeration of his crimes.

"Talk not, then, to me of threats and repentance, but rather aid me with thy subtle wit to invent some scheme to break this cursed union. There is gold to be earned; gold, I tell thee, man."

"I have heard you, Sir Walter," said his visitor; "now hear me. The fact that I committed sacrilege, and set fire to the church where your son was married, in the hope of destroying the registers, no one is more anxious to establish in the face of the world than myself. The forgery of your son's signature I am equally willing to acknowledge. Your threats are to me, therefore, as idle as the winds. I am past fear—danger cannot move me. In the deeds you accuse me of you were my accomplice. Your evidence decided the validity of your son's signature; and I still retain the letter in your own hand by which you directed me to destroy, *at any risk*, and by any means, the records of the church where you supposed your son was married. Therefore, if I stand within the felon's dock, Sir Walter Mowbray, baronet, late minister of state, and lord-lieutenant of a county, shall find a place beside me; and, but for the poor boy's sake, whom I would save from a dishonoured name," he added, sternly, "it should be so; there would be justice in it, and one in heaven would smile. Why I have determined to atone our mutual wrong, you will never learn; enough that I have resolved. The marriage certificate is in my possession, the proof of identity complete, and unless you aid me in establishing the rights of your grandson, I will put the proof into his hand, which will enable him to prosecute you for felony."

"Felony!" replied the baronet, proudly.

"Murder, then, if you prefer it," added Prim; "accessory before the fact."

"Pshaw! you trifle with me. You in such case would hang with me."

"I know it," calmly answered his visitor.

"Consider the gallows."

"As well by the hands of the executioner as my own," hurriedly exclaimed the lawyer, at the same time rising from his chair. "I give you till to-morrow to consider of my offer, so employ the time wisely; either prepare to acknowledge your grandson, or I give myself up to justice as the murderer of his mother and implicate you in my fate."

"You cannot! What proof?"

"Your letters. Besides, if that should fail, there is still the forgery of your son's name."

"Be reasonable, Prim," cried the agitated man; "come, tell me the sum you require."

"Good morning, Sir Walter."

"Ten thousand pounds?" added the bewildered baronet.

"A million would not bribe me. Farewell! atonement or judgment."

With these words the lawyer quitted the room, leaving the proud, ambitious man a prey to terror and the upbraidings of a guilty conscience.

Punctually at three o'clock, the bishop, accompanied by his solicitor, Burley, and Hamilton, arrived at the police-office in Bow Street, and requested a private audience of the well-known magistrate, Sir Richard Burns—a request which, from the rank of the parties, was instantly complied with. Prim, the lawyer, accompanied them; and it was on his statement—of which the magistrate took notes—that a warrant was demanded for the arrest of Lord Moreton.

"It is indeed, my lord, a sad, a singular affair," observed Sir Richard, addressing the bishop, "and will cause much scandal in the world. Permit me to ask if the purpose of your visit is for justice or revenge?"

"Justice, most certainly," replied the prelate.

"Might it not be accomplished by private means—a mutual understanding?"

"No!" exclaimed Prim, firmly; "the abduction and death of his victim must be proved, or the identity of his lordship's son is lost sight of."

"A peer of the realm, too! Really, Mr. Prim, you are too severe; but perhaps this rascally agent, this lawyer whom you spoke of, may at the last moment turn round and deny his late confession. In that case you will have alarmed your enemy, and put him on his guard."

"Little fear of that."

"By the bye," continued the magistrate, "what is the rascal's name?"

"Nicholas Prim," was the unhesitating reply.

The knight raised his glasses, and looked upon the speaker with astonishment, deeming him mad or jesting. He had known him for many years, and looked upon him as one of the shrewdest men in his profession. To hear him, therefore, accusing himself of crimes which might possibly affect his life, passed his comprehension.

"Am I to understand that you are the Mr. Nicholas Prim you name?" he demanded.

"Certainly," said the lawyer; "there are not two such villains in the world."

"And you persist in your declaration of complicity with Lord Moreton?"

"I swear it."

"In that case," replied the magistrate, "I have no other resource than to grant the warrant."

Long immunity in crime had made Lord Moreton reckless. Although much shocked on the first appearance of the man he had so cruelly injured in the House of Peers, he soon overcame the whispered terrors of his conscience, and not only vanquished the remorse occasioned by his presence, but felt his old hate revive. Age had not sobered his fierce passions, or cooled the resentment he felt towards the being who had humbled his pride and chastised his presumption.

On the evening of the day on which the warrant was issued there had been a debate on an ecclesiastical bill, which the Bishop of Tythetail felt it his duty to attend in his place to support. This he did with his usual moderation, eloquence, and learning, and commanded the attention of the house. Moreton was furious—envy was gnawing like a hungry vulture at his heart—and he replied in so intemperate a strain that even the opponents of the measure were ashamed of him, and the cries for order were louder than are usually heard in that aristocratic house, where every thing like effect is studiously avoided, and the man would be set down as a parvenu who permitted himself to display either excitement or passion. There was a dead silence when he resumed his seat; all expected that the bishop would reply to him.

"Although Lord Moreton has forgotten," said the prelate, calmly, "the courtesies due alike to the office which I hold, and the respect of this honourable house, I shall not follow or reply to him. My answer is to you, my lords, whose silence has done justice alike to his arguments and language. Why Lord Moreton has thought proper to attack on every occasion the views I have advocated, you will soon have an opportunity of judging, since he will speedily have to answer to the laws of his country for acts of felony and abduction committed against the peace of my house and the honour of my name."

Lord Moreton was thunderstruck; he had resumed his seat, after speaking with a malignant air of satisfaction, and sat darting looks of defiance and hatred towards the speaker, conscious that his position in the church prevented his answering him in the only manner he feared.

All eyes were turned upon him, and he winced from their gaze. Moral courage he never possessed; even his physical one deserted him, and he had scarcely strength to rise and leave the house. Several peers, the debate having been interrupted, rose to retire at the same moment.

"What the devil does the bishop mean by felony?" demanded Lord Heartley, as they descended the principal staircase together. "Is he mad, or have you really been placing yourself in his power?"

"Some folly respecting his mistress, I presume," replied the peer, affecting a careless air; "the affair will reflect more discredit on his lawn than on my ermine. But as I don't choose to be annoyed by the fellow, I shall see my lawyer, who is conversant with the whole affair."

"No chance of a trial, then?"

"Pooh! he could never show his face after the exposure," said Moreton, whose courage was beginning to return; "it would be enough to sully all the lawn upon the bench, a quarrel about a mistress."

"Liar as well as coward!" exclaimed a deep voice near him. He turned hastily around, and encountered the stern glance of Burley, whose usual equanimity was at an end on hearing his mother's name thus lightly spoken, and by her destroyer too.

"Did I hear you aright, Mr. Burley?" demanded Lord Moreton, haughtily.

"No longer Burley, but Fitzgerald," replied the young man; "the son of him whose happiness you destroyed—of her who sought refuge in death from your brutal violence, and who has publicly branded you both as a liar and a coward."

"Enough!" exclaimed the peer, pale with rage; "I have your address—you shall hear from me."

"Let it be speedily then," answered the young man, "for even my injuries will not allow me to meet on equal terms a convicted felon."

By this time the party had reached the bottom of the staircase, and Lord Moreton's carriage was called by the under-marshal. It drove up to the entrance. Just as he was about to step into it, two respectable-looking men in scarlet waistcoats barred his passage,

and one of them, holding out a parchment as proof of his authority, exclaimed:

"My Lord Moreton, I arrest you for felony!"

"Arrest me!" repeated the conscience-stricken man; "a peer of the realm, and on such a plea! ridiculous! Let me see your authority?"

The officer placed it in his hands.

"This must be communicated to the house," observed the Earl of Heartley, hastily reascending the stairs, followed by several of his brother peers, whilst others remained to watch the affair with Moreton and the officer.

At the prisoner's request, the captors allowed him to retire to one of the waiting rooms of the house till the decision of the committee of privileges should be known. Here he was left for a considerable time alone, a prey to the bitterness of his reflections; for the officer, out of respect to his high rank, had remained outside the door.

"Curse him!" he murmured, alluding to the bishop; "that man was born to be my ruin. From the first moment I beheld him I felt there was a secret antipathy between us—a something I was bound to hate Curse him," he added, "in his cold pride and taunting scorn!"

For a few moments he paced the apartment in gloomy silence, pondering over the affair. That Ellen and Fitzgerald had been legally married he could no longer doubt, though how Burley could be their son he could not find the slightest clue. A thousand times did he curse his impetuous passions, and wish for the presence of the cool, resolute agent of his villanies—the lawyer, Mr. Prim.

Gently opening the door of the chamber, he beckoned to the officer, and showed him a purse of guineas. The man shook his head: he judged that they were intended to bribe him to wink at his escape.

"Can't, my lord; my professional character is at stake. Never nabbed a lord before—not a right down earnest one. Mustn't make a mistake here; Sir Richard would never forgive me."

"I have no wish to escape," replied the prisoner.

"Haven't you?" said the fellow, with a longing look at the purse.

"All I want is permission to send to my lawyer."

"No objection in life, my lord; you ain't committed yet. Send for him by all means. One of my men shall run for you directly."

"A messenger from the house will spare you that trouble. It is Mr. Prim, of the Inner Temple."

"Who?" repeated the officer, with a look of astonishment.

"Mr. Nicholas Prim, of the Inner Temple," repeated the peer.

"Then I can't help telling you, my lord, that your case is a damned bad one,—excuse my swearing. Well, only to think of the old rat; your own lawyer, too; why, my lord, he is principal evidence against you."

"What mean you?"

"That he accompanied the bishop and that young fellow who was quarrelling with your lordship when I nabbed you, in the visit to Sir Richard; and it was upon his confession that the warrant was granted against you on the charge of abduction and kidnapping a child."

"The infernal scoundrel!" exclaimed Moreton, bitterly; "after the sums he has fleeced me of, too! Fool that I was to trust him!"

"That's what I say, my lord: never trust a lawyer. In all the plants I have been employed to trace out, never knew one in which a lawyer was concerned that he didn't split. They generally contrive to hang their accomplices, and escape scot-free themselves. Knowing vermin! Not that I suppose for one moment, my lord," he added, with a bow which was intended to be respectful, "that you run any risk that way. It ain't a capital charge."

On hearing of the treachery and defection of Mr. Prim, the guilty man lost the little courage which had hitherto sustained him; and after requesting that his servant might be sent for, to whom he whispered some directions, delivered himself up to shame, mortification, and despair. His pride was galled to the very quick, and he felt that, whatever might be the result of the investigation, his character in England was irretrievably gone; that he could never show his face in society again. To fall from such a height—and through the instrumentality of the man he hated—was gall to his rancorous soul.

"No," he murmured, "I will not give mine enemy that triumph. He may smile upon my grave, but he shall never trample on me while living. After all,' he added, "it is but one bold plunge; I have long been tired of life, and may as well take the leap now as a few months hence perhaps. Better to swallow the contents of misfortune's chalice at a single draught than drain it drop by drop; and yet 'tis hard to die—to die, too, unprepared."

Seating himself, the speaker waited the return of his servant in gloomy meditation. The man made his appearance in about half an hour; he had apparently been running, and held a letter in his hand; his acting was so natural, that even the suspicions of the officer were never for once excited, and he allowed him to pass unquestioned into the presence of his master, and alone.

"Here is the letter, my lord!" exclaimed the man, loud enough to be heard by those on the outside of the door.

"Give it me."

Hastily putting the pretended letter in his pocket, the fellow drew from his bosom a pistol, and placed it in the hands of Lord Moreton, who received it with a grim smile of satisfaction, for he felt that it made him once more master of himself.

"And the reward, my lord?" whispered the fellow.

The peer hastily placed his pocket-book and watch in his hands; the rascal's eyes flashed with cupidity as he opened the book, for he found that it contained notes to the amount of a thousand pounds. At this moment the voice of Lord Heartley was heard approaching the door.

"Begone," said Moreton; "thou hast thy bribe. To stay might be dangerous to thyself."

As the domestic passed out of the room Lord Heartley and several peers entered it.

"Moreton," exclaimed the kind-hearted man, "I am sorry for you; but the house has confirmed your arrest. There was no resisting the evidence of Erringcourt, and——"

"I know, I know. And where am I to be dragged to?"

"To the Tower, of course. A messenger from the house will accompany you."

"An instant and I am ready."

The door of the apartment was thrown open, and the officer of the house to whom the custody of his person had been transferred approached the unhappy man, and was just pronouncing the words of arrest when—hang—an explosion was heard; and the

guilty Moreton fell upon the floor a hideously disfigured corpse.

"God!" exclaimed Heartley; "he has shot himself!"

There was a general rush to the door. No sooner was the intelligence communicated to the peers than the house immediately broke up, and the prelate and Burley returned home.

When Prim heard of the suicide of his former employer and patron, the only effect the news produced on him was a grim smile. In acting the part of an avenger he found the only consolation guilt had left him: his heart seemed lighter by the act.

"Dead!" he murmured. "Well, he is wise. In the grave is peace; a resting from that gnawing of the heart—that aching of the brain—which poison time, and make its moments fall like the sound of a death bell, as we count them in our misery. Dead! One criminal is already punished; his accomplice has not long to wait."

The next morning, agreeably to his appointment, he waited upon Sir Walter Mowbray, and found the stern old man much more cool and collected than he had reason to expect. In reflecting on the marriage of his grandson with the celebrated dancer, Mademoiselle Mosine, he saw a punishment of his unnatural pride for having treated the widow and orphan of his first born so harshly. His better angel had visited his couch, and he felt almost inclined to repent and to atone.

"You are as punctual as you threatened, Mr. Prim," coldly observed the baronet.

"I was always so in rascality," replied the lawyer; I will not be less so in repentance. May I ask what is your resolution on the subject of my last visit?"

"I must first know the position of the man you call my grandson."

"It is honourable."

"Is he married?"

"Unmarried."

"And well educated?"

"As a soldier and a gentleman. Unassisted, except by his resolution and natural courage, he has made his way to distinction. If I err not, you have already met him," added Prim.

"Where?" demanded the baronet.

"In society with the Prince of Wales. Your grandson and heir is no other than the elegant Colonel Hamilton."

Sir Walter Mowbray was no less astonished than reconciled by the intelligence. The idea that his abandoned boy should have risen to a position in society by his own unassisted efforts gratified his pride; it reminded him of the adventurer and founder of his race, Aubrey de Mowbray, the valiant knight who first accompanied the Norman Rollo in his expedition to France, and won a heritage at the point of his sword.

"Ay," he muttered, "he has his father's spirit and his father's blood. The eagle roosts not with the kite; like the royal bird, he has mated with his kind. Who, after this, shall say that birth is a tradition? Besides," he thought to himself, "the Lady Adela Howard, who should have been the bride of his disobedient cousin, may yet bring her high name and lands to our ancient house." The thought pleased him; and the desire of punishing the youth who had braved his malediction and dared to disobey him was balm to his wounded pride, and he resolutely made up his mind to acknowledge him at once.

"Prim," said the old man, "not your threats, nor any weak relentings of feeble nature, have decided me; but the sense of what is due to the name I bear—which it is my duty to bequeath as pure to my descendants as I received it—has determined me. Mosine!" he added; "the bones of William the Crusader must have trembled in his tomb. None of the outcast race shall dishonour his proud name. I will acknowledge him."

"Thank God!" exclaimed the lawyer. "The evil, then, may be in part atoned. "Thank—no, no," he added, interrupting himself, "I dare not thank, lest it should offend Him. But He sees that I am grateful that one sin at least is removed from my overladen conscience."

"When may I behold him?" demanded the baronet.

"To-day—nay, this very hour."

"This evening, then, I shall expect him."

The lawyer rose to depart. A tear was in his burning eye, and it calmed something of its agony. His child—his child whom he had starved, murdered—he fancied looked from heaven upon his efforts to reinstate her boy, for whom she had endured so much, with a less angry face, and the thought brought consolation to him. His hand was upon the handle of the door, when the voice of Sir Walter arrested him.

"Tell me," he asked, "does my grandson know his wretched mother's fate?"

"He does."

"And doubtless resents the part I acted in it. There—there I shall be punished."

"Repentance will teach him to forget it," replied Prim; "he has forgiven *even me*."

There was something revolting to the grandfather's pride, who had always held a high head in his family, in the idea of being forgiven; but anger, and, let us hope, repentance, induced him to dismiss it.

"Let him come," he sighed; "I shall expect him."

Great sensation was created in the higher circles by the death of Lord Moreton, and the romantic circumstances which gave cause to it. By some it was reported that the female he had abducted had been the mistress of the prelate; by others, that she was his wife. The advocate into whose hands the bishop had placed the certificates of his marriage and Gerald's birth immediately commenced proceedings to enable him to assume the name which legitimately belonged to him, and in one of the papers of the day the following paragraph appeared:—

"Extraordinary Event in High Life.—One of the richest prelates on the bench, whom all the world had hitherto supposed a bachelor, turns out to have been married, and has discovered his son in the person of Mr. Burley, the ward of Lord Erringcourt. The honourable gentleman henceforth will be known by the name of his distinguished father, Gerald Fitzgerald."

A second ran thus: "The marriage so long spoken of between a distinguished member of the episcopacy and the daughter of a noble marquis appears, after all, never to have been contemplated. The name of the son—whose existence, till lately, was unsuspected—should have been substituted for his lordship's. The affair is connected with the death of Lord Moreton. Legal proceedings are about to take place, which will disclose circumstances painful to the surviving friends of that unhappy man."

Gerald—for so, for the future, we must call our old acquaintance Burley—felt his cheek burn when he read the last named paragraph. Not a word on the

subject of Georgina had ever passed between his father and himself. Respect kept him silent; still he cherished hope.

"Well!" exclaimed Hamilton, as soon as Prim entered the room where he and his cousin were seated, "have you seen my grandfather?"

"I have," replied the lawyer.

"And what is the old man's resolve?"

"Instantly to acknowledge you as the heir of his name and fortune—to atone his wrongs to your parents by doing justice to your claims. I shall not live to see you," he added, "wear the honours of your race, but my bones will rest the quieter knowing they must be yours."

Both the young men were astonished by the tone of sadness with which the humbled man spoke of his regret: fortunately they little knew the cause; it would have shocked them too much to know that the author of their parent's misery and their own unfriended childhood was their grandfather.

"At what hour," said Hamilton, "am I to visit him?"

"This evening, at seven. I will conduct you."

"Good; I shall expect you."

Prim bowed humbly, and withdrew. He would have given worlds, had they been his, merely for the pressing those young men by the hand; but the blessing was denied him. The ill-disguised loathing with which both turned from his presence stung him to the heart and chained his lips in silence.

No sooner were they alone than Gerald warmly pressed his companion's hand and congratulated him on his distinguished birth and future title.

"I shall never bear it," replied the colonel, sadly; "never, Maybird, never! A coronet would not efface the prison brand, or cleanse my heart from the sickening sense of its pollution. I should bear amid the world a nameless dread—a living terror—lest men should recognise in Sir Walter Mowbray the pupil of Aaron Wolf—the thief—the pickpocket—the escaped from the gallows."

The tone of deep misery in which the words were uttered convinced Gerald how far the iron had entered into his soul. He saw that the wound was cureless; still, with the kindliness of his nature, he endeavoured to console him.

"The world will never know it."

"But I shall know it. I cannot live in fear; I will not live an incarnate lie, receiving from men's lips respect of which I am unworthy. Even your friendship, Maybird, yours—the being to whom my heart clings with all the recollection of its boyish brotherhood—would be a reproach to me. I could endure your scorn, your reproach, but not your contempt or pity."

"Contempt! pity!" repeated the young man, laying his hand affectionately upon his arm; "are these fit words between us, George?—for, to each other, we still are, and ever must be, George and Maybird. This is a morbid sensitiveness, which, I trust, time will cure. I would not hold a place in that man's heart who, judging your temptations, could not balance them against your errors. You will think better of this."

"I have thought of it, and the memory will not leave me. God!" added the unhappy man, "how happy we might have been, had not——but I dare not dwell upon it, lest I curse the authors of my shame. No. I will see my grandfather—see that he does justice to my mother's memory, and then farewell to England."

"But not for ever?"

"For ever!" repeated Hamilton mournfully; "farewell to all, save one, whose affection has been an oasis in my desert path; and she, I know, will share the wondrous fate with all the devotion of woman's love."

"You are happy," sighed his friend; "happy in the midst of all your misery, for you have some one to love you and sustain you in your trials."

The sigh which accompanied this speech was at the recollection of Georgina.

"Promise me," added the young man, "that you will take at least a month to consider of your resolve."

"I promise."

"And then?"

"Should my resolution keep, with a firm heart, though broken spirit, farewell to England."

"And I," said his friend, "will be the first to bid you go, should you find that your happiness demands the sacrifice."

"Honour may demand it," replied Hamilton; "I have no right to sully the name of an honourable race. I will see my grandfather, do all in my power to clear my mother's memory, and then to commence a new life in another clime."

With these words the young men separated, the colonel to visit the loving Phyllis, Burley to accompany his father to dine with the Marquis of Scarton.

At the appointed time lawyer Prim and his grandson arrived at the mansion of Sir Walter Mowbray. The baronet received them in his library; he had prepared himself for the interview, and was stately and cold as became the descendant of Aubrey, the founder of his race—one of the proudest and most unscrupulous robbers that ever achieved nobility, or obtained an estate from a plundered, outraged people.

"Welcome, young man," said his aged grandparent, glancing complacently at his elegant person and distinguished air. "Hitherto there has been little in my conduct for you either to love or respect; but it is my intention to make atonement for the past by kindness for the future."

"The atonement most grateful to my heart, Sir Walter, will be the justice rendered to my mother's memory," replied his grandson. "For myself, the world is wide enough, and there is a name and fortune to be gained by all who have courage to use a sword, and tempt its dangers."

"Thought like your ancestor."

"Felt like a man accustomed to depend upon his own energies. For the past, though it has left scars which neither time nor a career of prosperity can efface, it is impossible I should show resentment where nature tells me it would be misplaced. The injuries to your son's unhappy wife rest between your conscience and your God. I share your blood too nearly to judge between them. The dead become their own avengers."

"They do, indeed," bitterly groaned Prim: "they haunt us in our sleep, poison our waking hours, and dash with gall the memory of the past. Wrongs to the living may be atoned—forgiven; but death's seal leaves the account unclosed."

"They tell me you have served abroad," observed Sir Walter, willing to change the conversation, the tone of which was becoming extremely painful to him.

"I have."

"In France?"

"In the guard of the Count d'Artois, to whose

favour I owe the empty title which distinguishes my name. I say empty, for the generous prince, since the misfortunes of his royal house, is himself a fugitive from France, and a dependant on the bounty of the Empress Catherine."

"No matter," replied his grandfather; "it is still something to have served the Bourbon. Many of your ancestors served and shed their blood under the oriflamme, and I am not displeased that you have followed their example. Prim tells me you are unmarried."

"And likely to continue so," replied the colonel, with a bitter smile; "few would wed with the nameless and the outcast."

"Nameless no longer!" exclaimed the old man, proudly. "My heir, the representative of the house of Mowbray, may aspire to an alliance with the noblest in the land. Do you forget," he added, proudly, "that our blood has twice been mingled with that of Plantagenet and Tudor?"

"And been polluted by the prison-brand," thought his hearer to himself: "a stain which not a hundred ancestors can remove, since the virtues of our forefathers can no more atone for our demerits than those demerits can sully the virtues which ennobled them."

"The degenerate boy," said the baronet, "so long regarded as my heir, was to have married the Lady Adela Howard, a maid of pure Norman blood and ancient possessions. 'Tis well, perchance, the affair has gone no further; you shall replace him."

"I!" exclaimed the astonished Hamilton.

"You," repeated his grandfather. "The alliance was contracted under the idea that he was my successor in the old baronetcy of Mowbray. She will not, I think," he added, regarding the young man complacently, "prove irreconcileable to the change. Her father and I will regulate the affair."

"But the lady's heart, sir?"

The old man looked at him with an air of surprise. In his vocabulary the heart was assigned but a very unimportant place; he regarded it as a mere forcing pump necessary for the regulating the human machine; at least, his own had never struck him in any other light.

It was finally arranged between Sir Walter and the lawyer that a friendly action should be imme-

diately commenced in the name of his grandson against the baronet, to recover a portion of a legacy which had been left by a paternal great-aunt to the descendants of her brother, and which his grandfather as executor should defend. This would bring the question of identity at once before the tribunals, and either establish or invalidate a claim by a decision against which there could be no appeal.

As Hamilton—for so we shall continue to designate him for the present—took his leave, Sir Walter placed a pocket-book in his hand. On examining it at his leisure, it contained, he found, a thousand pounds.

"So," said the baronet, "the offshoot I rejected, as unworthy to support the honours of my house, turns out to be the roof-tree. Thank Heaven! he has none of his plebeian mother's weakness; but all the energy, courage, and determination of the Mowbrays. I think," he added, "I shall be proud of my grandson."

Great sensation was occasioned in the higher circles by the rumours of the approaching trial, which the lovers of the scandalous and marvellous expected would be accompanied by many singular disclosures; nor were they disappointed. Hamilton, from his intimacy with the Prince of Wales, had become a noted person in the world of fashion. His royal friend took a warm interest in the affair; and on the day appointed for the hearing in the King's Bench, took his seat, accompanied by Sheridan and Colonel Hanger, on the bench beside the judges. The bishop, his son, and Sir Walter Mowbray were there.

Infatuated as Richard Mowbray had become with the worthless creature he had married, it is not to be supposed that he was content tamely to resign the prospect of a baronetcy and forty thousand a-year. The lady was furious. From her connections amongst the tribe of Israel, she had obtained a clue, as she imagined, to certain passages in Hamilton's life, and Aaron Wolf had been subpœned as a witness by the noted Sergeant Splutter, who watched the proceedings for her husband.

Cooper, the eminent king's counsel, opened the case for the plaintiff with his usual eloquence. He painted the sudden death of Captain Mowbray, and the unprotected, helpless state of the widow and her child, touching but slightly on the hesitation which the grandfather had felt to acknowledge a claim, the justice of which he had but lately been convinced of. When he found that he had obtained the attention, not to say the sympathy of the jury, he adroitly turned the subject to the progress of his client, cast thus unfriended on the world.

"I shall prove to you, gentlemen, that the individual whom your verdict will restore to the position in the world of which he has been so long and wrongfully deprived, was removed from the humble lodging on the night of his widowed mother's death, and exposed to the mercy of that Providence which watches over the innocent—on a bench in St. James's Park; that he was there found by an honest sergeant of the Fusiliers, who gave him to the wife of a Corporal White to nurse; that the said corporal, with a prudence which cannot be sufficiently commended, made certain marks—indelible signs—upon the person of the infant, by which, even at this remote period of time, he has been able to recognise him; that,"—and here the learned gentleman hesitated, for it was the delicate point of his case—"that the youth went on the continent, where he entered the *garde du corps* of his Royal Highness the Count D'Artois, and ultimately rose to the rank of colonel in the French service. Since his return he has moved in the most honourable society. The distinguished friends whom his high character has interested in his welfare, prove, by their presence on this important occasion, the esteem in which they hold him."

Here a low, dry cough from Sergeant Splutter caused the speaker to hesitate again. Taking courage, he looked with an air of virtuous defiance on his opponent, and concluded the opening of the case by an appeal such as juries are seldom insensible to.

"I resume my seat," he added, "sensible that this great wrong will be righted by your verdict. The majesty of justice is committed to the guardianship of your intelligence, and that intelligence cannot fail to trace through the maze of misfortune, injustice, and crime, the glorious light of truth. I ask your verdict, gentlemen, by the memory of the dead, who have been outraged in depriving their offspring of his natural rights, even of the very name they gave him. What hearth is safe, if the orphan may be with impunity despoiled? What parent will not feel the pangs of the dying hour made doubly bitter when they reflect that the objects round which their last affections linger may be cast upon the world to prey at fortune? Marriage would then cease to become a safeguard to legitimacy, and society be deprived of its holiest institution. For my client I demand the name of his ancestors, the inheritance of his blood, the restoration of his mother's fame. My task, like his rights, is a holy one; and I doubt not but it will be accomplished triumphantly through your ministry."

With a flushed countenance the learned gentleman resumed his seat. The first witness called was Mr. Prim, who having been duly sworn, the counsel proceeded to the examination. The countenance of the unhappy man was pale—almost livid; but there was a settled resolution in his eye and brow which showed his mind was fully made up to the task before him.

"Your name, I think, is Prim, an attorney-at-law?"

"Nicholas Prim, and I am an attorney."

"What do you know respecting the marriage of the late Captain Mowbray?"

"That it took place privately, without the consent of his father. Here is the certificate."

The paper was handed to the judge, who, after perusing it, returned it to the officer of the court, who handed it to the jury, by whom it was passed from one to another.

"Be kind enough to state how it came in your possession," resumed the advocate.

"From the executioner who performed his fearful office on the man whom I employed to steal the child."

A thrill of horror ran through the court at the cold, quiet tone in which this answer was given.

"Am I to understand that you were an accomplice in the act of abduction?"

"The sole contriver of it. The fellow I employed I knew, from sad experience, to be a daring villain; a house-breaker, a smasher, thief, and pickpocket; a devil, ripe for any villany, ready to sell his soul for money, or risk his life to obtain it."

"You saw him enter the room or lodging of the unhappy widow of Captain Mowbray?"

"I did."

"Was he long absent?"

"About a quarter of an hour; he entered and descended through a back window, which looked upon a waste piece of land. When he returned, the child was in his arms."

"You received it from him?"

"I did."

"How did you dispose of it?"

"I took the infant into the park, and left it upon the bench near the pond."

"Do you remember the day?"

"The 8th of February, 1775."

"Did you ever see the child afterwards?"

"I did."

"Where?"

"In the barracks of St. James's. I heard that it had been found by a Sergeant Gonrlay of the Fusiliers, and consigned to the care of the wife of Corporal White. I employed two persons to represent the grandfather and grandmother of the infant, who went there to claim it."

"When was this?"

"About three days after I had exposed it.

"Are those persons living now?"

"No; both are dead."

The learned counsel, who had taken notes of the witness's replies, looked over his brief, and resumed his seat—casting, as he did so, an anxious glance at the learned sergeant who was to cross-examine Mr. Prim.

Splutter was one of the most dashing advocates of the day; a man who could weep by turns like a crocodile, or rave like a bully. He was the terror of witnesses, whom it was his practice either to frighten or bully, worry or confuse, till, by sheer exhaustion, they faltered in their evidence, or he wrung from them an admission to found an objection or a point upon.

Fixing a hawk-like eye upon his customer, who he saw was evidently a cool one, he bade him, in a tone which was intended to express virtuous indignation, to look at him.

"I do."

"Straight in the face, sir; let the jury see your countenance. No shifting—no blushing. There. Now tell me, Mr. Nicholas Prim, how many years have you disgraced the honourable profession of attorney?"

"Exactly fifty-six years; as you will find, if you refer to the Law List."

Splutter was chagrined at the witness's manner. He had hoped to have annoyed or stung him.

"Your practice seems to have been a *very respectable one?*"

"Unfortunately not, sir."

"Have you often been concerned in similar transactions?"

"In more than one."

"Of course you did not move in this affair without some instigator? You were employed?"

Prim remained silent.

"I say," resumed Splutter, "you were employed in this abduction, supposed or real, of a child whose very existence at the best is but hypothetical. Remember, man, that you are upon your oath!—not that I suppose the recollection would make much difference, according to your code of morality; which the intelligence of the jury, I doubt not, will do ample justice to."

"I was employed."

"By whom?"

"Sir Walter Mowbray, who has long been my client."

There was a pause. The judges looked at each other, and it was evident that a very unfavourable impression respecting the wealthy old baronet prevailed in court. The counsel was dumbfounded. The answer was the last he expected or wished, as, instead of favouring, it injured his client's case.

"And do you really mean to tell me, their lordships, and this intelligent jury—look at them, no shuffling—that the very respectable and distinguished gentleman you have named employed you to abduct, carry off, and mercilessly expose his own grandson?"

"Certainly not. Sir Walter *said* that he doubted the validity of the marriage," replied Prim, "even that the ceremony had taken place at all, for he never saw the certificate, and left the affair to be arranged by me, in whom he placed implicit confidence."

"He knew that you had obtained the infant?"

"He did."

"And your manner of disposing of it?"

"No. Believing the child illegitimate, he gave me a considerable sum of money to undertake the care of him, and never made, that I recollect, any inquiries afterwards."

All this was delivered in a tone so firm and collected, that it produced an impression in favour of Colonel Hamilton in the minds of the jury. Although examined and cross-examined, subjected to the most biting sarcasm, taunts, and insidious questioning, Prim never wavered or lost his temper for an instant. There was no shaking the admission of his guilt; on the contrary, in coarse but forcible replies, he seemed to take a humiliating pleasure in painting his conduct in the frightful colours which its depravity merited. To have heard him, one would have thought him a speaking machine, so perfectly cold, passionate, and unmoved were his answers. Sergeant Splutter placed his hands behind the back of his gown—a favourite attitude with him when aroused—and demanded, with a countenance flushed with passion, whether he really expected him to believe him.

"*I am sure you do*," was the quiet reply.

"Sure I do!" repeated the lawyer, in a tone of anger. "I deny, indignantly deny, your impudent assertion. No, sir, I do not believe you; nor will these twelve honourable, intelligent, respectable jurors believe you; not a person in this court, I am sure, believes you. What," he added, "Sir Walter Mowbray plot the destruction of his own grandson! Preposterous! incredible!"

"Sir Walter Mowbray is in court. You can call him, if you think proper."

This was a hit there was no parrying, and the man of law grew absolutely red with passion.

"How much do you expect for this conspiracy—for conspiracy," he added, "I do not hesitate to pronounce it—to foist one of your own children into an honourable family?"

"*I have no children.*"

The voice of deep agony with which Prim made this last reply was so hopeless, so truly wretched, that even those who had turned from him with an expression of disgust at his crimes felt moved to something like a sentiment of pity. It was the only occasion on which he displayed the least emotion. With a patience which would have rendered him worthy of the honours of a martyr, he bore the browbeating, ridicule, insults, and reproaches which the disappointed Splutter heaped upon him; he compelled him to expose the ulcers of his soul in every possible light, expatiate with minuteness upon his crime, nor spared him a single humiliation. Finding he could make nothing of him, or in a single point shake his evidence, he sat down, furious, flushed, and disappointed.

Corporal White was the next witness called; he confirmed, both as to date and circumstance, the finding of the boy, and described the peculiar marks he had made upon his arm, in order, at any future period, to recognise him.

At the request of the counsel, Colonel Hamilton bared his arm, and the witness was directed to look at it.

"That's it!" exclaimed the honest soldier; "although 'tis twenty-five years since, they are as fresh as when first made. I'd swear to them anywhere."

"How much are you to get for your evidence, my man?" demanded Splutter, as soon as he rose to cross-examine him.

"The pleasure of speaking the truth," replied the honest fellow boldly, "but perhaps you can't understand that."

There was a slight titter in court. The learned sergeant was decidedly unlucky in his cross examination that day. As the trial proceeded, the advocate for the plaintiff traced the progress of Colonel Hamilton, from his infancy to boyhood, from boyhood to manhood, never losing sight of his identity, and in concluding his address evidently made a favourable impression upon the minds of the jury.

Sergeant Splutter rose in reply; his fee was a heavy one; he had been nettled by the complete failure of his efforts to shake the evidence, and he determined to use his eloquence to the utmost.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I stand before you this day to unmask one of the foulest conspiracies ever entered into to dishonour a noble family; to introduce an adventurer, and perhaps something worse than a mere adventurer, into its bosom; to deprive a gentleman of his succession to a fortune and title, of which he has long been regarded as the legitimate heir, and which, I doubt not, you will by your verdict this day confirm to him."—Here the speaker went on with great tact and skill to describe how the once-powerful mind of Sir Walter Mowbray, weakened by age and anger at the marriage of his grandson, had been wrought upon by Prim—whose threats and visits immediately after that event he should prove—to acknowledge a supposititious heir, one whose early life had been devoted to depravity, and already received the reprobation of the law."

Intense interest was excited. The confidence with which the speaker assured the jury that he should be able to prove that the man who now called himself Colonel Hamilton had been a pickpocket and thief astonished even those most accustomed to his reckless assertions, and made many think that, after all, their sympathies had been enlisted on the wrong side.

Hamilton neither shrank from the gaze which was turned from every point of the court towards him, nor carelessly braved it. He was very pale, and his demeanour was that of a man called upon to defend his best possession—honour. Once, and once only, did the blood rush with tumultuous violence to his heart—it was when the crier of the court called out the name of the next witness—Mr. Aaron Wolf.

"Here, my lord!" cried the aged Jew, as with an alacrity beyond his years he stepped into the witness-box.

Prim—who, the moment he had concluded his extraordinary evidence, had resumed his seat by the counsel—took up a position exactly fronting the Jew. He saw the effect which his appearance produced upon his grandson, and but too well divined the cause. Fixing his eyes upon him, he endeavoured to reassure him by a smile. The counsel began the examination.

"Your name is Aaron Wolf?"

"Yes, I am a respectable dealer and broker. I've lived in the parish this twenty years—paid all my rates."

"Never mind your rates now. Did you know one George Sedler?"

"Vich? there vas two of them."

"The one who was always supposed to be the son—and doubtless was the son—of the man who was executed some twenty years since at Newgate."

"Oh, yes, I know him, and a pretty rascal he was: nearly got me into a scrape once. Thinking him an honest youth, I bought a watch of him, which turned out to have been stolen."

"What became of that boy?"

"He vas twice convicted for robbery; broke from prison the last time, and left the country."

"Transported?"

"No—run away—vent abroad."

"Do you think you would know him again?"

"Could swear to him from a million; never forgot any body in my life, or any thing."

The Jew, directed by the counsel, moved his eyes towards the bench where Hamilton was sitting suffering the horrors of martyrdom, without even the relief of a groan to ease his overcharged heart. There was a smile of cunning, triumphant malice on the lips of Aaron Wolf, and his small, black eyes twinkled with pleasure as they rested on the noble form before him. Just as he was about to speak the words which would have sent Hamilton home a suicide, a short, peculiar, dry cough was heard from Mr. Prim, who had risen, with many others, from his seat to watch the recognition. Aaron's eye caught his.

The lawyer put his hand in his waistcoat-pocket and took from it a snuff-box of enamel richly set with brilliants. The gems flashed with an accusing brightness in the eyes of the astonished witness, and he hesitated, for he read a fearful menace in the eyes of him who held it.

"Come, sir," said the counsel, "have you sufficiently considered?"

Large drops of perspiration ran down the forehead of the witness, upon whom Prim had fixed his eyes with an expression which fascinated him. Twice he was about to give the fatal answer, and twice did that look restrain him. The court became impatient.

"Is this gentleman," demanded the judge, pointing at the same time to Colonel Hamilton, "the same person as the boy George Sedler, of whom you have been speaking?"

"No," replied the Jew, with a sudden effort; "I never saw that gentleman before."

Prim quietly closed his snuff-box, and returned it to his pocket.

"Never saw him before!" exclaimed the astonished counsel; "why, man, did you not declare that you could swear to him—swear to him from a million?"

"So I could, if it had been George Sedler," replied the Jew, doggedly.

"But you declared that it was he."

"You declared it vas," said Aaron; "and I said, 'If it is, I'll swear to him.' But as it is not, I don't see very well how I can, Mr. Splutter. I am a respectable man, and would do any thing for you in the way of trade; but I can't perjure myself to oblige you."

The heart of Hamilton, who could not understand by what means he had been preserved from infamy and shame, beat freely, and he once more glanced round the court with an easy, unembarrassed air. The

prince bowed and smiled to him. That smile was of incalculable advantage to him with the jury, which was composed principally of tradesmen.

Aaron Wolf underwent a rigid cross-examination, but nothing was elicited to shake his evidence. He stated again and again, *upon oath*, that Colonel Hamilton was not the man, or in the least resembling him. During the scene the snuff-box of Mr. Prim played a conspicuous part; every time the Jew hesitated he tapped it and took a pinch; the sound of his fingers on the lid produced a reply favourable to the case of the plaintiff.

From the failure of Wolf's testimony the evidence for the defendant broke down so completely, that he had not a leg to stand upon. The judge summed up with a visible leaning towards the plaintiff; and after a day of intense interest, a verdict was returned which established at once the claim of Hamilton to the name of which he had been so long deprived. No sooner was it given than Prim marched out of court to pay a visit to the little churchyard in which the remains of his murdered child reposed. He had made one step towards reparation, and his heart felt lighter.

As the Prince of Wales passed from the court, he shook the hand of the colonel warmly.

"Let me, Mr. Mowhray," he exclaimed, "be the first to congratulate you on your restoration to the name of your ancestors. The miserable defence set up by the husband of Mosine entirely failed."

Colonel Mowhray—for such was now his legal appellation—could only bow; his heart was too full for words; he longed to rush from the heated court and give vent to his feelings in solitude.

"I see that you are too much excited," resumed the good-natured prince, "for conversation; let me see you in a few days at Carlton House."

But few words passed on the occasion between Mayhird and George. Knowing the errors and misfortunes of the life of his friend, the former had been equally agitated as the colonel himself when Mr Aaron Wolf made his appearance in the witness-box.

"Vell," said the Jew, as he directed his steps towards home, which, our readers may recollect, laid in the purlieus of Westminster, somewhere at the back of the Abbey—"pretty day's work! Lost a thousand pounds all through that cursed lawyer; and it will cost me another, I dare say, to get that snuff-box out of his hand. I must have it," he muttered, "if it cost me half my fortune; *there's a halter* in every stone it contains. I wonder where he keeps it—how the devil he obtained possession of it."

At this moment a tall, rawboned, ragged creature, who had been amongst the spectators in the court, slapped him on the back. The creature was half drunk, and called him a jolly trump.

"I'm any thing but a trump. There, go away, good woman; I've nothing to give you."

"Who the devil expects it?" said the hag; "and yet the time has been when Aaron Wolf would not have refused a crown bowl of punch when he wanted to wheedle a secret out of Lizzy."

"What," said the Israelite, "Liz of the Rising Sun?"

"Yes, and half a hundred slums beside. You have not forgotten me?"

"Were you in court?" eagerly demanded the old man.

"Ay, could have screamed with delight at the fun of the farce, only the sharks would have grabbed me. It was as good as a play to see the judges looking as wise as owls, while Prim was tapping the lid of his snuff-box. Ha, ha, ha! a pretty box that, Mr. Aaron Wolf."

"Was it?" he answered carelessly. "I scarcely noticed it."

This was uttered with an air of pretended indifference, which only served to excite the visibility of the gaunt, wretched-looking object who had addressed him, and of whom, since the discovery of her name, he evidently stood in some secret fear.

"It's a lie, Wolf—your eyes were riveted to it; the sight of it sent the blood from every vein in your coward carcase into that miserable thing you call your heart, for you felt that he could hang you."

"Hang me, Liz!" replied Aaron. "Pooh! you are drunk."

"Drunk or sober," repeated the woman, passionately, "I tell you he could hang you; and so *could* I; and I will one day, perhaps, when the world grows dull, and I get crabbed for want of sport! It's a funny world, when two persons in it can hang so respectable a man as yourself."

"Remember," said the Jew, "that these words are actionable. I am a respectable man—pay rates and taxes. Who would believe such stuff, from a ragged drunken creature like yourself?"

"Am I?" said the woman, seizing him by the arm, for her evil passions were roused by the tone of defiance in which he spoke. "Ragged and drunk as I am, if I went before the beak with a certain lace cravat, which, twenty years since, you gave me to wash, and which I never did, but kept it—kept it with the marks of blood upon it—how long would the respectable Mr. Aaron Wolf remain out of prison?"

The old man turned fearfully pale at her words.

"How long," continued the virago, "before the beak with the black cap would say the cold-meat grace over you, and you'd take your last ride in the hangman's cart?"

"Hush!" said the terrified Aaron; "you may be overheard!"

"Do you confess that I could hang you, then?" she continued.

"You can hang me!" faltered the Jew, opening his purse, and offering her money.

"Keep your hands—I don't want them," said the woman, pushing back the money with her coarse red hand. "Liz isn't the girl to split on an old pal. But mind, no foul play to George; no plotting against him, or I'll send you to the gallows as sure as my name is Liz."

"You seem to take a great interest in the fellow," observed the Jew, sarcastically; "I should scarcely have expected a tender passion from a woman of your age and character. I thought such things were long since passed with you."

"I love him," replied the hag, "because I nursed him when an infant; a hundred times has he sunk to sleep with his curly head upon this withered bosom, his little hands clasped fondly round my neck. Had you breathed a word," she added, fiercely, "to injure one hair of his head, I had strangled you, Aaron Wolf, like a worthless cur, as you are."

"Vell, vell," observed the man, uneasily, for he was old and feeble, and not much pleased at the idea of a struggle with the powerful old woman, who could easily have fulfilled her threat; "we are all friends now. If George had any reason to complain of me when he was a boy, I have done him justice now that he is a man. Father Abraham, forgive me for the lie I swore to. Cost me a thousand pounds, Liz. But

have you seen the young dare-devil and spoken with him?"

"I see him! I, who would have trained him to the gallows, see or speak with the noble boy? No, Aaron, no; I have watched him early and late, from the dark corner of the street in which he lodges; waited up half the night but to catch a glimpse of him."

"What good did that do?" demanded her companion.

"Made my heart feel lighter. I have brushed with my rags so close beside him, that I have almost touched him, but I have never spoken with him. May be," she added, bursting into tears, "he thinks I wanted something, now that he is rich and a gentleman. Had he been poor I should have spoken to him."

It is a strange thing, the human heart. Vice, ignorance, crime, and poverty may assail it, but there still remains one spot which shows it is not all corrupted. This poor degraded woman, the companion all her life of thieves and cut-throats, would not make herself known to the boy she had been so kind to, because she felt that her presence would be painful, and that her lessons to him had not been wise ones.

"Good-bye, Liz; remember, whenever you want a friend, you know where to find one."

"Ay, Satan has always his agents," said the woman, with a laugh; "and the bond between them is fear, not love. Do you think I'd venture to your den," she added, with a laugh, "to be poisoned, or have my throat cut, and my body thrown down that sewer of yours? No—no; when I want you I'll send for you."

With these words the two worthies parted—Aaron to contrive some means of wheedling Mr. Prim out of the talismanic snuff-box; and Lizzy to indulge in the propensity for gin-drinking, the original cause of her fall from virtue, poverty, and degradation.

A few days after the eventful trial we have so imperfectly sketched, similar proceedings took place in the same court of Westminster, and Mr. Prim, with the same imperturbable expression of countenance, mounted the witness-box. The proceedings, this time, were to establish the identity and birth of Burley. This, by the evidence of the lawyer and Lord Erringcourt, was easily accomplished, and a verdict similar to the one in his cousin's case established him in the eye of the law as Fitzgerald's son.

Three days after, he was invited by his father to accompany him on a visit which he intended to make to the Marquis of Sourton, at the magnificent seat of that nobleman, in the country. Gerald's heart beat high with hope. The name of Lady Georgina had never, since the first interview with his father, been breathed between them. Still he felt assured that he would not have desired him to have been the companion of a journey which was to blight the dearest hope of his existence. He was not deceived. Immediately on their arrival, the prelate, bowing gravely to his still affianced bride, took the arm of the marquis, and led him into the library, leaving the two conscious lovers to entertain each other. It is needless to say that an explanation ensued, and that the fair girl stood fully exonerated in Gerald's eyes for having consented to espouse his father when he understood the cruel deception which had been put upon her with regard to his pretended marriage. His arm had stolen gently round her unresisting waist, and he was about to press her to his heart, when the door of the apartment was opened, and the bishop approached where they were standing by the window. The lover both blushed and started.

"It is time," said his lordship, taking a hand of each and joining them together, "that this uncertainty should end. Love each other," he added, "and be as happy as a father's blessing can make you, or his heart can wish. And now, young lady," he continued, with a smile, "as soon as you have recovered your grief at exchanging an old beau for a young one, remember that I have a match of chess to play against you; and I shall win it, too," he added, "despite Gerald's instructions; let him do his best."

The happy girl could only kiss the hand which had so generously released her, and hurry out of the room, to give vent by tears to the overflowing happiness of her young heart.

"You are silent, Gerald," observed his father.

"But not ungrateful, my dear lord. In giving me Georgina you have given me all that the yearnings of my love have sighed for: affection is satisfied, but——"

"But what?" demanded the astonished prelate.

"Not gratitude. Erringcourt—the good, kind, generous, mistaken Erringcourt—who bitterly deplores the doubts by which he wronged your character. Be not angry; he was a father to me ere I knew the loss of such a tie—a protector when childhood most needs protection. He has erred—but oh, forgive him!"

"You love him, then, more than your father," replied Fitzgerald, in a voice of deep emotion. "Well, 'tis but nature, and I will not selfishly repine. I remove the interdict which I had placed upon your intercourse. You are at liberty to see him."

"And tell him that you forgive him, father?"

"Yes."

"And will see him?" added the young man.

"Never," said the prelate, rising from his chair, and walking hastily about the room. "His doubt I might have forgiven—for he doubted even of himself, gazed on the dark shadows of humanity, and avoided its brightness—but he has deprived me of that the poorest wretch has claim to—the heart's inheritance—the love of my own child."

"Father!"

"Speak not, deny it not. To you I am comparatively a stranger. Erringcourt was the companion, the guide of your infancy—the friend of your intelligence—the being to whom you clung with that holy confidence which renders the love of parent and child almost a worship. I may, I do forgive; but I cannot see that man."

Gerald had never before seen his father moved so deeply since the day of their recognition; for, generally speaking, his manners were cold and reserved even to him; and this unexpected burst of feeling warmed and delighted, while it pained him. Respectfully taking his hand, he raised it to his lips.

"Not so, my lord. Do not, I implore you," he continued, "wrong either your own qualities or my heart, by a suspicion which may destroy the happiness of us both. If nature has spoken late within my breast, it was not that the chords were absent, but untouched. I respect and love Erringcourt, but not as I love and venerate my father. I shall never attempt to see him but at your request."

The bishop, with all his errors, was not an ungenerous man. The reply of his son pleased, if it did not convince him. As he was one of those who seldom act on impulse, he concealed his resolution within himself till he had well considered it.

A few days afterwards they returned to London, in order to make the necessary preparations for the approaching marriage.

"Congratulate me, George!" exclaimed his friend, when the two young men met; "I am about to marry the only being whom I ever did or can love; both our parents have given their consent, and in a few days I shall call her mine."

"Happy Maybird!"

"And are not you, George, happy?"

"Ay, as the man who sits upon a mine, and hears the hissing of the fuzee beneath him. I cannot lead this life of compromise with patience; my heart is seared, collapsed. I only waited for your return once more to press you by the hand and say good-bye. I must quit England, and for ever."

"What will Sir Walter say?"

"E'en what he pleases; I owe him neither love nor obedience. I have established the honour of my mother's name; as for his title, I shall never bear it."

"Consider, George, the solitary life of an exile."

"Not solitary, Maybird; I have one who, through good or evil days, will share it with me with all the devotion of a true-hearted woman's love."

"A companion," repeated his cousin, reproachfully.

"Soon to be my wife; for the only bar to our union has lately been removed by the death of the fox-hunting squire her husband, who broke his neck in a steeple-chase."

"Why not be married at the same time with myself?"

"I feared to ask it; but it would give a pleasure to my heart to let the same hour witness our union. But perhaps your noble bride——"

"Has a heart," interrupted his friend, "still nobler than her name. You will forego this resolution, George, to renounce the honours of your family?"

"Never!" replied Mowbray, firmly; "but my heir, should Heaven permit me to become a father, may live to claim them. You, I am sure, would be his friend and guide, Maybird, for the memory of old times and his poor father's sake. Farewell! I must see Phyllis, who loves me, despite my crimes, the least of which is not the one which made her mine."

"But the Lady Adela Howard?"

"Must find another husband; or if she has settled her mind upon a Mowbray, marry my grandfather. They would make an excellent match—pride and wealth."

The young men separated, each to visit the object who was about to confide her happiness for life to his care.

The evening before the one appointed for the marriage, Prim, who had become terribly altered made his way slowly on foot to the residence of the Bishop of Tythetail, in St. James's Square. The prelate had given orders for the removal of his library and effects to the palace of his see, intending to withdraw at once from political life, and resign his splendid mansion and immense fortune to his son, reserving only to himself such an income as the dignity of his high office rendered necessary.

The lawyer was at once admitted to him; the prelate was much shocked at the alteration which had taken place in him since he last beheld him; the flesh had fallen away from his face, giving his high cheek-bones and hollow eye an almost skeleton-like appearance.

"You have been ill, Mr. Prim," he observed.

"No, no; or, at least, I have not observed it. My visit, my lord—and it is the last time I shall ever trouble you with the presence of one whose sight must be so repugnant to your feelings—is on business. Your son and his cousin are about to marry."

"To-morrow the union will take place."

"I shall not be there to witness it—at least, not as a guest; shall not dare to offer a blessing to the boys of my murdered children, or even a paltry gift. Of course it's right; I know and feel that it is right; but I will not detain you, my lord. This packet"—and he drew it from the inner pocket of his vest as he spoke—"contains just one hundred thousand pounds. Divide it, my lord, between them."

The bishop hesitated; he did not wish to wound the old man's feelings, lacerated as they already were by remorse and sorrow, still he could not take it; the doubt how it was acquired withheld his hand. Prim saw his hesitation, and understood it.

"There is not a penny of the sum," he said, "that has not been honestly, legitimately gained. Think you," he added, in a voice of deep emotion, "I would enrich them with the price of their mother's blood or of my crimes? No—no; I am not so fallen as that."

His son-in-law no longer refused, but took the packet.

"And now, my lord," resumed his visitor, "farewell. Promise me one thing—that you will never let my grandsons know the tie which existed between us; it might weaken their love for their mother's memory to know they sprang from such a source—humble and mortify them both."

"I promise you," replied Fitzgerald.

The old man placed the packet in his hand, and, bowing humbly, left the house.

At the same hour a very different scene was passing in the mansion of Sir Walter Mowbray. The old baronet had heard of the intended marriage, and sent repeatedly to see his grandson, who did not arrive till after the third messenger had been dispatched.

"So, sir, you are come at last!" exclaimed the old man, pale and exhausted with rage.

"I attend your pleasure, Sir Walter," said the young man, coldly, yet respectfully.

"Pleasure! then it is my pleasure to know whether this report of an intended marriage with the widow of some wretched fox-hunting squire is a piece of idle gossip or a truth."

"A truth."

"And you dare to tell me so?"

"Dare!" repeated his grandson, with an expression of contempt so cold and withering that it wrung the iron heart of the old man. "Dare! Why should I either love or fear you? Why turn a hair's breadth from my path, or consult either your feelings, wishes, or inclinations? I owe you nothing."

"Call you the name of Mowbray nothing?" reproachfully exclaimed his grandfather.

"Take it back, lest it should one day be coupled with that of George Sedler the felon—the prison-bird—the thief. I have vindicated my mother's memory. I will not dishonour it by unworthily bearing her name. To-morrow I quit this land for ever."

"What!" shrieked Sir Walter, "the last heir of my house expatriate himself—leave a gap in the inheritance of eight hundred years! No—impossible! the malediction of your outraged grandfather would pursue you."

"I am not a man whom curses can move from a once determined purpose. Farewell, old man; control the fierce passions of your nature, and bow your white

head in penitence and prayer. Ask of God to forgivo you for the hearts you have broken—for the crimes yon have committed; and accept the downfal of the ambitious hopes for which yeu have stainod yonr soul so deeply, as an expiation for them both!"

With these words the speaker tnrned coolly upon his heel, and walked from tho house, despite the frantic abuse and imprecations heaped on him by the baronet, whose extreme violence gradually exhausted him, and he was borne, feeble as an infant, to his chamber.

When the physician arrived, he saw at once that his patient was death-struck, and he gave no hopo of his recovery. The prediction was verified: in less than fonr-and-twenty honrs Sir Walter Mowbray was a corpse.

Just previous to the bridal party setting ont to the chnrch where the bishop was to unite them, he sent for his son into his study, and presented him by deed of gift with the mansion in London, all his vast estates in Scotland which he had inherited from Lord Bamff, and the secnrities which he held by mortgage over the lands of the Marquis of Sonrton. Of all his fortune he reserved bnt two thonsand a year, as his seo was a poor one, and the right of disposing at his death of a sum of twenty thousand pounds.

"Too much—too much of kindness, my dear lord," said Gerald; "yonr affection makes me more happy than your gifts."

"Stay," said the prelate, "here is a packet for your cousin; it contains one hnndred thousand pounds. Half of it might have been yours, bnt I anticipate your wishes in the bestowal of it. And now, Gerald," he added, "amongst yonr wedding gnests there is one whom I am sure you will be glad to see. Yon will find him in the library."

In an instant the young man understood him, and, kissing his hand, hastened into the adjoining room and was met by the companion and friend of his childhood, Lord Erringcourt, whom tho bishop had had an interview with over-night, and been reconciled to, and resolved that the day which was to secure his boy's happiness should, if possible, pass over without a cloud.

The bridal parties proceeded to the church, where the bishop himself pronounced the nuptial benediction, amid the tears of the blushing brides and the smiles of congratnlatory friends. One heart alone was wretched there—the lawyer Prim's—who, wrapped up in a large great-coat, purposely to disguise him, had stolen into the chnrch at an early honr, and seated himself in a distant pew.

Bad as he was, he was almost to be pitied. His heart longed to bless the boys, and yet he felt that it would be profanation. He longed to tell them they were of his blood, and yet he feared lest they should repel him with curses. His eyes were no longer restless, bnt heavy and blood-shot, and he hnrried homo to his solitary chambers in the Temple, with the determined step of a man bent on the fulfilment of a long-meditated purpose.

What that pnrpose was, was apparent when he entered the room which had so long served him as an inner office. Previons to going ont in the morning he had fastened a rope to the large oaken beam which ran across the ceiling. Throwing himself into his usnal seat, he fixed his eyes upon the fatal cord, and fell into a moody meditation.

"I can't live," he said; "my heart is a solitnde, or inhabited only by fiends! There must be peace in the churchyard—there can be no regret when the brain ceases to throb, or the pnlse to beat. I could bear the scorn of mankind, poverty, shame, but not the vengeance of that great and terrible God, who speaks to me in dreams—haunts me with terrors! Why," he added, "did he instil this passion in my soul? why curse me with this nnnatural thirst for gold? gold which I now wonld trample on! gold which I now despise! He cannot punish me for being what He made me! Still there is no hell, or if there is I shall so scare the devils when I reach it that they will fly from it, and I shall reign alone—alone—the usnrer, the mnrderer, the damned."

Hastily tearing off his cravat, he monnted the chair, and with a deliberate hand tied the cord about his neck.

"Now then," he exclaimed, "for the secret which has puzzled scholars and philosophers, the solution of the great mystery. I am a fool," he added; "consciousness is time, oblivion is eternity—I am going to it."

He sprang from the chair at the last word. There was a creak as the rope stretched, then a whizzing of the beam, which instantly became deluged with blood—a deep groan, and all was still.

Immediately after the marriage of his friend, Mowbray and the now happy Phyllis departed for the continent, where the repentant man finally rose to honourable command in the Anstrian armies; and his name is still remembered by many veterans, who speak of him as the gallant Mowbray.

The bishop, forgetful of the ambition which had at one time been the guiding star of his existence, retired to his diocese, and never mingled in politics more. Occupied in the duties of his high office, in spreading happiness around, he speedily became reconciled to retirement, and passed the evening of his life free from the storms of passion and of feeling which had obscured its morning. The love of his son, who appreciated more and more the sterling qualities of his heart and mind, and the interest he felt in his grandchildren, gilded the decline of life with a pure, nnalloyed beam of bliss, and the husband of Ellen expired full of years and honours, lamented by the poor, respected by the good. His son Gerald was proud of the memory of his father.

Twenty years had elapsed since the marriage of Georgina and her husband. Still they had never heard, except indirectly, from Mowbray. His sensitive natnre could not brook the humiliating light in which his early lapse from the path of honour placed him; and he deprived himself voluntarily of hereditary hononrs and wealth, resolved to earn a name in a foreign land as an atonement.

Georgina and her husband were seated under an aged oak, which was the pride of their domain at Monkshold, an estate the bishop had purchased back into the family. It was a lovely sunset; and the happy father and mother smiled as they watched their sons and daughters throwing the wild flowers in frolic sport at each other, or racing over the lawn with all the enjoyment of rude health. Suddenly their gambols ceased. A carriage was seen driving towards the honse; its owners hastened to receive their nnexpected visitors. Just as they reached the portico, the steps were lowered, and a handsome yonth, of about nineteen, assisted a military-looking passenger from the vehicle. Wounded and emaciated as he was by long snffering and sickness, the stranger and Gerald recognised each other in an instant.

"George!"

"Maybird!"

The next moment saw them in each other's arms.

"I am dying, Maybird," said the worn-out soldier, who had been severely wounded in the wars of the empire, "and I could not quit the world without one last adieu to the brother of my heart—the companion of my childhood. I leave my boy with you. You will love him for my sake at first; but when you know him, still more so for his own. The papers which confirm his right to his grandfather's title and estates are in the carriage. You will know how to use them."

"God! George!" exclaimed his friend, "you are dying!"

"Contented and happy, since I leave poor Gerald under your protection."

The youth whom the speaker alluded to burst into a passionate flood of tears as he knelt and kissed his father's hand.

"Gerald!" repeated his cousin.

"Ay, I named him after you. I was tempted to call him Maybird; but that was a name to be remembered only in an hour like this. I have one gift —it is yours; you have been my beacon in the path of honour; you will not refuse it?"

"Refuse!" said Gerald, deeply moved.

The dying man drew from his bosom the grand cross of the Austrian order of Maria Therese, and placed it in his friend's hands. "I won it, Maybird. An emperor's hand conferred it on the red field of battle. Be it the proof that if I fell from honour's path, it has not been without atonement."

Raising the cross to his lips, Gerald vowed to protect the boy soon to be left an orphan. When he turned, the worn-out soldier had expired—a smile upon his countenance, a tear upon his cheek.

CHAPTER I.

Should man the open palm extend,
Woo thee with smiles, and call thee friend,
Praise thee for merits not thine own,
Condemn thy foes, their fault unknown,—
Shrink from that man, avoid him, fly;
Friendship, like love, can mask and lie.

It was six o'clock on a bright morning in June, and the bell was pealing lustily from Briarton and Wilmott's factory in Spitalfields, calling the spinners and

fillers to work. The establishment was a large one; the firm held an excellent character on 'Change; and if occasionally some sober citizen shrugged up his shoulders at the sight of the junior partner's tandem, as it dashed through the city on its owner's occasional visits, the recollection of his uncle's wealth, whose only daughter he was affianced to, checked any thing like a doubt or surmise of his solvency. After all, perhaps, they argued, it was only the hot blood and dissipation of a young man who, when he had spent his superfluous cash, would doubtless settle down and lead a quiet life like one of themselves.

Old Mr. Briarton and Richard Wilmott's father had been brothers-in-law and partners. Each had commenced with about the same capital, married on the same day, and their only children—a boy and a girl—been born within the same month.

Before young Wilmott was fifteen he had the misfortune to lose both his parents—a loss which the too indulgent care of his uncle, who soon afterwards became a widower, failed to replace. The recollection that he was the orphan son of his old friend frequently checked the reproof upon his lips, when he was a boy. A father would have shown, perhaps, more firmness; a mother's counsel might have persuaded in youth and influenced in manhood. Unfortunately he was deprived of these salutary aids; and when, at the age of twenty-one, he came into the possession of thirty thousand pounds and a share of the business, he was a reckless, dashing, dissipated, but not bad-hearted man.

Passionately fond of racing, no sooner was he his own master than he ventured upon the turf, and lost his money as naturally as a sheep does its wool when driven through a quickset hedge. The knowing ones welcomed the pigeon whom all were eager to pluck, with a thousand gratifying attentions. They listened to his opinion upon horses, and followed their own; drank his champagne in bumpers to his health, and laughed at his wit in their sleeves.

His companion and Mentor in fashionable life—that is, such fashion as a sporting citizen may aspire to—had been Captain Francis Faddle, a plausible man of the world, whose manners would have been elegant had they been less studied, but whose dashing, off-handed style was more than likely to captivate the friendship of a young man just entering into life; a passionate admirer of every thing fast.

By the time he had reached his twenty-fifth year, Richard Wilmott's account at his banker's was materially lessened; one or two angry discussions had taken place between him and his uncle, respecting certain bills which he had accepted in the name of the firm; but his daughter's tears and nephew's promise of amendment had generally succeeded in pacifying the old man, who observed, when talking over the affair with his confidential clerk, that boys would be boys, and predicting that each imprudence would be the last.

The time also was rapidly approaching for the proposed marriage between the cousins. The gentleman, it must be confessed, was but a cold lover, and showed little eagerness for the match—to him Ellen Briarton was nothing more than a sister.

Just as the factory bell ceased ringing, two pretty, neatly-dressed girls entered the factory yard. The tallest, whose name was Rose Ashford, possessed that quiet, dove-like beauty which indicates deep feelings, sensibilities, and passion. Her eye, generally bent modestly to the ground, was of that rare violet-like blue which painters love and poets dream of. Her beautiful bosom, veiled rather than concealed beneath a muslin neckerchief, might have tempted an anchorite, it was so round and gracefully formed. There was a natural coquetry as well as neatness in her dress unusual with persons in her station. No lover of the beau sex could have passed her unobserved. Her companion resembled, in her style of countenance and mien, more a Parisian grisette than an English girl. Her figure was *petite*, well formed, and active; her dress far more gay than that of Rose.

It was the day on which the Derby was to be run for. Wilmott and his friend were booked to go down; indeed, the tandem was already being harnessed in the factory yard, which was divided only by a wire fence from a narrow slip of ground parallel with the house.

The two girls loitered and chatted as they watched the groom sponging the spruce drag of their young master, in which he had driven Faddle, the preceding night, from his box at Epping. Occasionally their eyes glanced towards the windows of the house; the blinds of two alone were drawn. They well knew it was the sleeping room of Richard Wilmott.

"I'll bet thee a crocked sixpence," exclaimed Nancy—for such was the name of Rose's companion—"that he contrives to speak to us before he starts. Only play your cards well, and you may one day hold up your head with the proudest of them."

At this moment a grave-looking, handsome young man, whose age was about six-and-twenty, entered the yard from the counting-house. He had all the sadness as well as the neatness which distinguishes the city clerk—men who mark the epochs of their lives by holidays—whose existence has all the monotony of the clock, without the relief of its tick.

"The bell has rung, Rose," he observed, mildly; "why are you not, with your companion, at work? Or are you waiting to catch a glimpse of our young master?"

"Jealous again, Walter!" replied the fair girl, with an expression something between a pout and a smile.

"Jealous!" repeated the young man, blushing deeply; "you wrong me. Am I a man to be jealous?"

"Is a peacock vain?" demanded Nancy, impatiently, for she was vexed at losing the opportunity of seeing Captain Faddle. "Why you are jealous of her very shadow, because it follows her more constantly than you can do. You'd quarrel with the wind for playing with her hair, and almost find fault with the sunbeam for kissing her cheek."

"And yet, Rose," said the young man, addressing himself to his mistress, "I am not jealous, for I still love you dearly, dearly."

"A good reason for not being jealous, truly!" observed Nancy.

"Rose," continued the young man, "it was not your beauty won my heart. I have seen eyes as bright, chins as fair, and a foot as dainty. It was not these that won me; it was your modesty, your gentleness of heart, the virtues of your mind. These once blown upon, or withered by the breath of doubt, and Rose Ashford could never be the wife of Walter Maynard."

With a firm step and averted glance, the young man returned to the counting-house to his employment. The fair girl, whose thoughtless levity had called forth this unusual ebullition of feeling, looked like one just awakened from a dream; his words had wounded her pride and sensibility—the more so that she felt

that she deserved them. She knew that her young master was a libertine, that many had already fallen beneath his seductive arts, that she had been trifling not only with her own happiness but his, and her heart bitterly reproached her.

"Heyday!" exclaimed her companion; "here is a pretty sermon, and all for what? waiting a few minutes behind time. I should not be surprised but he speaks to the overseer to fine you. What, in the name of wonder, would he prove after marriage, since he plays the tyrant so handsomely before? A fig for his love and jealousy!"

"He is quite right," said Rose; "I have merited the reproof, but will do so no more. Richard Wilmott, the rich merchant, cannot seek the love of a poor factory girl in honesty; and if he did," she added, with a sigh, as she entered the door of the spinning house, "I have no love to give."

"No love!" repeated Nancy, with a smile, as she prepared to follow her; "nonsense! that is the only stock in-trade which never fails a woman."

Just as she reached the door, Captain Faddle and his friend, ready dressed for their trip to the races, made their appearance from the house.

"Stay, pretty nymph of the factory," exclaimed the former, advancing familiarly towards her and tapping her upon the shoulder; "wish success to my horse Bolter, and you shall have a ribband, as red as your own lips, to wear on my return."

"Thank you, sir," said Nancy, bobbing him a curtsey, "but I have plenty of ribbands."

"Where is Rose?" demanded his companion.

"At work, sir; we did but stop to admire your beautiful carriage, and breathe the fresh air for a minute, when Walter, her lover, came out and read her such a sermon, all about fine gentlemen, rakes, seduction, and other mantraps."

"The clown!" replied the captain, who had more than once been annoyed by the young man's watchfulness; for at first he had been smitten with Rose himself, but gave up the idea when he found it would interfere with his friend's pursuit. *He could not afford to drop him yet.*"

The girl eyed him archly as she observed that a clown of one's own was sometimes better than another person's fine gentleman. Faddle was aroused by her repartee, and caught her by the hand, which she coolly struggled to get from him. Her purpose was answered. She knew that Mr. Pike, the overseer, would not dare to fine her. She anticipated the pleasure of tossing her head, and saying, "I have been detained by Mr. Richard and his friend." Nancy could calculate the odds as well as the captain, although, like most youngsters on the turf of life, she got jockeyed at last.

"Piquant, i'faith," said the captain, still holding her by the hand. "Child, you are fortunate; you have absolutely given me a sensation. You have a bright eye and a pouting lip—a foot that would not disgrace a satin slipper—a hand," he added, raising it as he spoke, and paddling with it between his, "that—no, no—the hand would require bleaching. *N'importe;* I'll take you to the West End, and make a woman of you."

"Thank you," replied Nancy, with a knowing laugh, "but I am one already."

"By making a woman of you, I mean that I'll give you a coach, rich dresses, jewels," added the libertine; "in short, all that your pretty little heart can desire, or a man of fashion bestow."

The girl saw that he was only laughing at her. She was too shrewd to imagine for a moment that his attentions were serious; but her vanity was gratified by them. She existed but for admiration, and many a fine lady has done the same. Like a moth, she flattered round the lamp which dazzled her, nor knew her danger till, like the foolish insect, she had singed herself at its blaze.

"And when will you do all this?" she laughingly demanded.

"Directly after the Derby. Where shall my carriage take you up?"

"At the church door," replied the girl.

Wilmott burst into a hearty laugh. He rejoiced to see his knowing friend for once meet with a checkmate. He had known Nancy for years; followed her before Rose attracted his attention; and been foiled by her—not that he bore her any ill-will on that account.

"Fairly hedged!" he exclaimed. "Faddle, her cockney simplicity has proved too much for thy Newmarket wit."

"They hedge best," observed his friend, significantly, "who hedge last. You mistake, child," he added, turning to the girl, and chucking her lasciviously under the chin. "I am a gentleman, and never go to church."

"And I," replied Nancy, "am a poor girl, who never intends to ride in a carriage with a rich gentleman *till I have been to church.* So good morning to you, sir."

"Sharp, but confident I shall be too much for her yet."

"You think so?" said Wilmott.

"*I know so,*" replied his friend. "But what," he added, "in the name of Fortune, Dick, hast thou to make thee sad? A fine business, a plodding old uncle, who makes money while you spend it, and a rich wife ready to drop into your arms as soon as you choose to open them."

"Still I am not happy," sighed the young man. "I cannot love my cousin."

"Who the devil wants you? You will make all the better husband. Wives, when assured of the affections of the man they love, are certain to be exacting; it is the doubt which makes them obedient. Besides, the idea is unfashionable, antediluvian. Love your wife! Preposterous! According to modern morals you may love any man's wife but your own."

"But I love another," added Wilmott.

"It will make you the more circumspect."

"And that other, though poor, is as virtuous as she is lovely."

"Whew!" whistled the captain; "a factory girl, and virtuous! I blush to call thee pupil! A coach, dress, jewels, and a few oaths, and she will drop into your mouth like an over-ripe peach."

"And there, I tell you, Faddle," replied his friend, "with all your knowledge of the world, I tell you you are wrong. I have no child's experience where women are concerned. All have been tried and rejected. Nothing but marriage could tempt her. She is ambitious, and through that feeling alone might be won."

The captain started at the word marriage; it opened a new field to his fertile genius. Ellen Briarton, the rich heiress of the speaker's uncle, might then be his.

"Then why not marry her?" he laughingly exclaimed. "You are rich enough to please yourself."

"It would break Ellen and my uncle's heart."

"Do you intend," said the tempter, "to marry to please them or yourself? Marriage, after all, is not such a desperate affair. It is something like a cold bath, one plunge and it is over."

"We will speak of this again," replied his friend, as he retired to the house for his pocket-book, which contained bis betting list. "If the Derby turn out well, perhaps I—but we shall see."

"Fool!" muttered Captain Faddle to himself, as he gazed after him; "with wealth, honour, happiness within his reach, and yet to resign them for a toy, a woman, the caprice of a moment! Well," he added musingly, "the better for me. Ellen might then be mine. This ill-assorted marriage would throw him yet further into my power; misery and discontent would sow the seed, and I should reap the gain. World, I could laugh at thee; thy children have so little wit."

The speaker turned to observe the fashionable drag which the grooms had now put the horses to. His own man, a sharp, handsome fellow of five-and-twenty, with that peculiar, jaunty, knowing air, which distinguishes the London servant, was giving directions, occasionally chaffing the men, and speculating on the results of the day. An idea suddenly struck his master.

"Dick! Dick!" he called.

"Your honour," replied the man, touching his hat, and leaving the huge packing-case on which he had been seated superintending the operations.

"Come here, rascal; I have employment for you. I am in love."

"For the hundredth time, sir?"

"There about," replied his master, carelessly. "You have seen a pretty little dark-eyed girl, whose tongue is sharper than her eyes? Nancy, I think they call her."

The fellow slightly coloured and looked uneasy. The fact was, he had been smitten with the coquette himself, and dreaded his governor's interference on the present occasion.

"Oh yes, sir, I have seen her," he replied; "half the fellows in the factory are in love with her. But surely your honour would never demean yourself to her!"

"The silly thing," continued the libertine, "hinted at marriage."

"Ah, sir, it's a prejudice some girls have."

"We will indulge her then. You shall marry her for me."

"I?"

"You."

"*I'd sooner marry her for myself,*" replied Dick, who perfectly understood the captain's meaning. "Come, sir, consider. I have not been a disobedient servant. I've married three wives already to oblige you; and that's as much as you can expect from any one man to serve another, even if they're master and servant."

"Moralising, Dick!"

"Have you no conscience, sir?"

"As much as any gentleman requires. Shall I give you a proof, Dick?" continued the captain, fixing his eyes upon him with a peculiar expression, beneath which the servant evidently winced. "I still keep a certain cheque, to which you, in a moment of innocence no doubt, amused yourself by appending my name, presented, and got the money for. In the same case with the cheque is the letter you wrote, confessing your little indiscretion. My conscience, which you seem to doubt the existence of, tells me that I acted very wrongly in not placing both before a magistrate. I believe they *hang* for this sort of mistakes, don't they, Dick?"

"I suppose they do, sir," replied the fellow, hoarsely, "but we won't speak any more of that."

"Just as you please, Dick," said Faddle, coolly.

"If I must marry the girl, I must. What is to be her fortune?"

"Fifty pounds."

"Why, I had a hundred with the last."

"It comes easier to you now, Dick. I am a man who calculates these things. Convenient, obliging rascality I shall always encourage, but mawkish repentance and hesitation I kick to the devil."

The speaker turned as Wilmott made his appearance from the house, whip in hand, ready for a start. The grooms held the high-spirited horses while the young men seated themselves, and Dick and Wilmott's servants took their places behind. As the vehicle rattled out of the yard, the blind of one of the bedrooms was drawn slightly on one side, and a pale, anxious face was seen peeping after them. It was Ellen Briarton. As soon as the tandem cleared the gate, she let fall the curtain, and with a heavy heart returned to her restless couch.

"He never loved me," she murmured—"never *will* love. Gone again without one kind word, not even a glance at my window or a tap at my chamber-door to say good-bye. I often wish that my father had not brought us up together; it has made him regard me as a sister—no more, no more. Perhaps I shall never be more to him."

When Ellen Briarton descended to the breakfast-table, at a later hour, her eyes were red and swollen with weeping. Her anxious parent saw and guessed the cause.

"So," he said, "Richard is off again?"

"Yes," sighed the girl.

"And without bidding you good-bye?" added the old man, with a frown.

"It was so early, very early," sighed Ellen, who ever interposed her good offices when any thing went wrong between her cousin and her father. "Besides, I was not supposed to be up at such an hour."

"My poor girl!" exclaimed the old man, "you are ever more considerate than he deserves; not that I think Richard heartless—only dissipated and thoughtless. That precious Captain Faddle, too, has done him no good. I looked through the Army List at the Exchange rooms, for three hours, to see if I could find his name; but no—it is a strange regiment in which he, I suspect, has served."

"I think he is attached to Richard, father," observed Ellen.

"Ay, girl, as the ivy is to the oak, or the moss to the young sapling, whose growth it corrodes. I must see Richard on his return, and speak with him as a father has a right to speak. It is high time these tears and blushes were put an end to; and perhaps, after all," he said with a smile, "it is but the natural disinclination which every young fellow feels to part with his liberty even when he loves; for the boy does love you—must love you," he added, affectionately.

"Do you really think so, father?" demanded the young lady. "Oh! if I felt but assured of that, I could wait in the patient hope of becoming his wife—happy in the prospect. Often, when he has shown me any unusual kindness, I have felt my heart so light, and my dreams have been so gladsome, that a change seems to have passed over the spirit of my existence.'

"I will see Richard in the morning," continued her father, "and come to an understanding with him. If, as I doubt not, he is still worthy of your love, a few weeks shall see you married; if not," he added, bitterly, "cast him like a serpent from your heart for ever."

"Married," repeated Ellen to herself, as her father, after affectionately kissing her on the forehead, left the breakfast room; "no, no; something whispers me I shall never be his wife. It is long, very long, since the conviction first came over me. It was just before he went to college—the last time he returned from school. I see him now," she added, "as the carriage drove into the yard, full of health and boyish beauty, springing from it. He saw me on the threshold, blushing, trembling with delight; and yet his first word was for his hound, his second for poor Ellen."

Overcome by the recollection of the slight which had made such an extraordinary impression upon her girlish heart, she reclined her head upon the sofa, and wept bitterly; but hers were not the tears which relieve the heart. Hearing her father's step, she hastily rose, ashamed of her weakness, and retreated by another door to her own chamber, there to indulge her sorrow unseen and unheeded.

Let not our readers imagine that Ellen Briarton was nothing more than a love sick girl; there were the latent seeds of resolution and character in her composition, which only required strong circumstances to bring them to maturity. Her weakness was her devoted love for her unworthy cousin, whom it seemed the natural condition of her existence that she should love.

Scarcely had she left the breakfast-room than her father returned, accompanied by a hard-featured man of about his own age, whose dress showed that he held some occupation about the factory; in fact, it was no other than Mr. Pike, the head overseer, the terror of the girls and men when they were late—a man whose heart was generally thought to be as iron-like as his face, and one glance of that might have frozen the prayer of charity. Although far from ill-looking, there was nothing of humanity except the outline, and that seemed to have been filled up with stone instead of kindly flesh.

As an overseer he had ever been looked upon by the hands in the factory as inexorable; no excuse of a sick child would serve the young mother who happened to be late—the fine was exacted as from the drunken and the worthless. To the great amusement of the clerks and all about the establishment, Mr. Pike at last fell in love. To tears, prayers, and remonstrances he had long been accustomed to turn a deaf ear; but the good humoured laugh of Nancy when he scolded her, her cool indifference to being fined, and her bitter sarcastic tongue, made an impression which at once was the pleasure and torment of his existence. Like all great men, he was very much shocked on the discovery of his weakness; that he, the overseer of one of the first factories in Spitalfields, should fall in love with a common hand, was decidedly *infra dig.* He struggled against it, but it was of no use; his heart was stronger than his head, and bore away the victory. Many men in his position would have attempted to corrupt the girl. To do Mr. Pike justice, such an idea never entered his head. He made honest proposals of marriage, which Nancy, with her usual thoughtlessness, only laughed at, much to the dissatisfaction of her parents, who saw the advantage of the match.

Nancy's positive rejection of his offer, and mirth whenever he repeated it, instead of diminishing the old fellow's passion, served only to increase it. He became jealous—madly, furiously jealous; and many a factory lad had been fined or discharged, simply because Mr. Pike had seen him laughing and chatting with the young coquette, who did it purposely to torment him. He had been a spectator of the scene in the yard previous to the departure for the races; and, wretched himself, came to find ease, if possible, by making others miserable too.

"And who is this Rose Ashford, whom you say my nephew is running after?" demanded Mr. Briarton.

"Old Ashford the bankrupt's daughter," replied the man. "Your honour lost, I believe, a heavy sum then?"

"No, no—not so heavy," said his master, musingly, for the name had struck him with a painful recollection. "She must be reduced indeed to work in a factory like this for her daily bread. What is her conduct?"

"Humph—good enough, in a general way. She has lived with Nancy's mother since her parents' death; and, except with Walter Maynard, the second clerk, I never saw her walk with a man in my life, and never alone with him. Poor fellow," he added with a sigh, for a kindred feeling had made him almost kind; "he is breaking his heart about her! She has turned half the heads in the establishment."

"She shall turn no more here," said his master, somewhat bitterly.

"Am I to discharge her, then?"

"No, that were to be unjust, and might precipitate the folly we wish to avoid. Send Walter Maynard to me."

"Directly, sir," said Pike. His hand was on the door—still he lingered. His master, who perfectly understood him, saw there was something more upon his mind, but that he wanted encouragement to speak out.

"Well, what is it?"

"Your honour will excuse me; but it's all that infernal Captain Faddle!" exclaimed the overseer, with bitterness; "it is his example which corrupted Master Richard; it was only this morning I overheard him urging him to marry Rose."

"Marry her," repeated Mr. Briarton in astonishment; "impossible!"

"It's true, sir; he has an eye on her companion Nancy, but I'll baulk him there. If you wish to save your nephew from mischief, separate him from Mr. Faddle; he'll be his ruin. Ruin," he repeated, "even if he has not accomplished it already."

"What mean you?"

"Nothing, sir; of course it is no business of mine; but I am an old servant of the firm, and it is not a pleasant thing to hear in the city that tradesmen are unpaid and bills protested. Not the bills of the house of course; since you alone, I believe, according to the deed of partnership, have the right to sign them in the name of the firm."

"You know it as well as I do."

Pike rubbed his hands quietly, with the air of a man who had acquired a piece of useful information, and was determined to use it to his purpose. In the middle of the day, a most unusual thing with him, he left the superintendence of the workmen to his subordinate and started for the city.

At a late hour that same night, or rather on the following morning, Wilmott and his friend returned from the races. Just as they were about to start, in high spirits, in the course of the day, for Tattersall's—for they had been winners—Pike presented himself before his young master, and only informed him that his uncle wished to speak with him in his private room in the office.

There was an air of satisfaction in the man's manner which boded little good to Wilmott, whom he hated on account of Faddle—the cause, as he believed, of Nancy's disinclination to himself.

"I have a particular engagement this morning," replied the young man, who dreaded the interview in the private room of his uncle, where they had not been over pleasant of late; "tell him so, if it is not very particular."

"But it is very particular," said the messenger; "Mr. Gripe has been with him."

Gripe was the name of a bill-broker and money-lender, with whom Wilmott, since his losses on the turf, and reverses at the gaming table, had had many dealings. He coloured at the name, and muttered something about the old rascal having broken his word.

"I know nothing of that, sir," replied Pike; "what answer am I to give Mr. Briarton?"

That I will be with him in an instant," exclaimed the young man, throwing his hat and gloves upon the table. "Go and tell the captain he must wait for me; and hark you!" he added, with a slight touch of malice, "tell him not to forget the ribbands he bought for pretty Nancy."

Pike winced at the message, which was given purposely to torment him, since both the speaker and his companion had frequently been amused at the awkward, unrestrained jealousy which the unhappy Mr. Pike had frequently been betrayed into. Fearful of giving vent to the rage which consumed him, the overseer bowed and left the apartment. With all his love he was a prudent man, and the speaker was *still* his master.

Now then for a lecture!" sighed Wilmott, as he directed his way to the counting-house, "and, truth to say, I deserve but little consideration at my uncle's hands The best half of my fortune is already squandered, and Ellen—but I dare not think of her—I have broken her peace of mind," he added, "like a heartless scoundrel, and trifled with my happiness."

Contrary to his expectation, he found his uncle calm, nay, even kind. Several ledgers and account books were lying on the desk before him, as well as three bills for fifteen hundred pounds, which in a moment of necessity he had incautiously accepted in the name of the firm.

Richard," said the old man, "it is time that you and I came to an understanding. Four years since, when I called you into this room to give an account of my guardianship, you were the owner of thirty thousand pounds, and a clear half of the factory. How do you stand now?"

"Really, sir, it is so long since I looked over the accounts, and I have been so occupied lately, that—"

I will tell you," continued the uncle. "The thirty thousand pounds is spent. You are indebted to upwards of ten thousand to the firm, independent of private debts, the amount of which I have no means to calculate, and have, contrary to the deed of partnership, signed three bills in the name of the firm."

"I have, indeed, been most imprudent, sir," replied the young man, more moved by the speaker's kindness of manner than by the most bitter reproach; "worse if you will—heartless."

"We will not speak of that. When my old friend died, he bequeathed me two trusts—the reputation of the house for integrity, which we had jointly founded and his orphan son. Perhaps," added the old man and a tear fell upon his cheek as he spoke, "you will smile when I tell you that the latter was dear to me as my own son. I one day thought that he would prove one to me. God knows with what happiness I yearly set aside his share of the profits as they accrued—toiled, and watched. When I make up my last account, my old friend and partner will bear witness that I have been faithful."

"Faithful!" repeated the young man, deeply moved; "more than faithful. You have been the truest guardian—the kindest, best of uncles. I am a villain—a fool—a madman, unworthy of the affection you have wasted on me, the interest you take in my well-doing."

"I have fulfilled one trust, then," said Mr. Briarton, "and must not neglect the other. Your father's name in the commercial world was pure. For his sake I will maintain his son's. Every debt shall be discharged, but the firm is at an end."

"At an end!" repeated the astonished nephew.

"You forget, Richard, I have a child. I scorn to rob my friends; I will not wrong my own By signing these bills in the name of the house you virtually cease to be a partner. Your share is to be estimated as so much capital, and will be withdrawn, deducting all claims upon it. May you, with the little that remains, become a wiser and a better man!"

Wilmott paced the floor of the room with a hurried step; the consequences of his mad career were thus terribly set before him.

"I have not deserved your kindness, sir; and yet I cannot accuse my heart—that, at least, has been true; but impulse prompted me—passion hurried me—and, like an unbroken steed, I have pursued a course whose end is ruin. Act as you think best—decide as you will; but, for my father's sake, forgive me."

"I could do it, Richard, for your own sake, did I but believe your repentance real; not the ebullition of a moment, but that steady penitence which leads to reformation. You have an advocate within, whose heart is enlisted in your cause, whom you have too much neglected."

"Ellen," sighed the young man, for even in his present extremity he still regretted the sacrifice of his hand where he felt he could never give his heart—"she, indeed, has cause to hate me."

"Hate you," repeated his uncle; "why, her very existence is enshrined in yours. Her heart-strings cling around you as the ivy clingeth to the stately elm. She has loved you in your boyhood—her passion grew with her growth, and strengthened with her strength. No, Richard—do what you will, go where you will, the love of my child must still accompany you."

"Fool!" exclaimed the young man, deeply moved by the picture the speaker drew of his cousin's love, for at that moment even Rose was forgot; "I have thrown, like an idiot, life's pearl away, and never shall meet its fellow."

Overcome by remorse, he paced the floor of the room. The thought of what he was, and what he might have been, unmanned him. His uncle was seated in the chair which, when a child, he had seen his father so often fill. The memory of old times came over him, and the reckless man of fashion wept, not the unmanly tears which a selfish care-like spirit weeps, but such as Virtue smiles to witness—tears of penitence and shame."

"Come," said Mr. Briarton, "this is more than I expected—almost more than I wished. Where the heart is right, the hand cannot be for ever wrong. Let matters rest awhile as they are. Give me a list

of your debts. Mark me, Richard, *all*. Let there be no concealment; but one heart, one confidence, between us. Break off your acquaintance—for I cannot prostitute the word by calling it friendship—with this fashion-monger, the captain. Obtain Ellen's forgiveness; mine and my blessing," he added, "shall not be wanting."

"You must intercede for me there, dear uncle, if you will."

"I!" said the old man, with a smile; "a pretty figure I should be to plead a lover's pardon, and with my own child, too! No, no; trust to my experience, you will prove the better advocate of the two. The task of age is to console—to bind the broken heart—to lead and to advise; 'tis youth's to breathe the words which call the blush into the cheek and flutter girlhood's heart."

"And do you really think, then," demanded Willmott, "that Ellen can forgive my negligence and only seeming coldness?"

"Try her, Dick, try her. It will be your own fault, at any rate, if we have not a marriage before the year is out."

The young man knew, by the speaker calling him once more by the old and familiar name of Dick, that his forgiveness was cordial and sincere. In the first blush of his regret he felt that he could almost love his cousin—from his very heart he wished to do so. Hastily pressing his partner's hand, he left the counting house to seek Ellen, and make his peace. In his way across the factory-yard he encountered his evil genius, Faddle.

"Where the devil have you been?" demanded the latter. "Has old Spinning Jenny been reading you a lecture? By Venus, but I have not seen you look so dull since the last Derby."

"Possibly not. It is not often that I make an examination of my heart."

"Heart!" repeated the libertine, eyeing him with a satirical expression. "In the name of curiosity, if you have such an antiquated appendage, what did you find there?"

"Regret," said the young man, coldly, "for energies abused, for time and fortune wasted, for true affection trifled with. Make the same examination, Faddle, and you may perchance make a still more startling discovery."

"Not I. When the powers of enjoyment are passed, and age has chased away the merry laugh of youth, perhaps I may follow your example."

"In short, Faddle, I have resolved to lead a new life."

"Whew!" whistled his friend. "Be certain first that the new will answer to the rein as well as the old."

Bursting into a scornful laugh, he commenced singing the old refrain:

"When the devil was sick,
The devil a saint would be.

"This is past even your license.

"But when the devil got well,
The devil a saint was he.

"There, I have done," he added. "Since you are resolved to moralise, faith! I'll e'en join you; you shall make a convert of me. Egad! I wonder which they will laugh at most at the club, you or me? How Coningsby will chuckle! he will be king of the turf now. There will be a general mourning with the fast bloods of the age when they learn that the best whip, the prime songster, the knowing one, has bolted from the course—after such a bet, too. Why you netted four thousand, at least, by the Derby, yesterday. Had Fortune been so kind to me, I would as soon wed her eldest daughter as make her so ungrateful a return."

"Yes, yes, the old girl has been kind at last," sighed the young man, whose unsuspecting nature sided generally with the last speaker, whether for good or evil.

"What a career," continued the tempter, "to resign! Not only the chance—nay, the certainty—of winning back your losses, but making a fortune—a million, perhaps; of doing the knowing ones—ringing the changes on the old hands of the turf; and, pshaw! damn it, Dick! don't hedge shabbily."

Willmott felt his resolution going, and, knowing his own weakness, dared not trust himself.

"Good-bye," he exclaimed; "you can take the drag. There's my book; draw the needful for me."

"And pay that damned old rascal Gripe?" demanded the captain.

"No, no; my uncle has already done that for me."

"Not so flat as I thought. The affair looks better."

"He has offered, too, to pay all my debts."

"The good Samaritan! Would to Heaven he had been my uncle!"

"On one condition," added Willmott, hesitatingly; "that——"

"You amend, cut racing, stick to spinning, and marry his daughter," interrupted Faddle. "Well, you are right. Of course you promised."

"And intend to keep my word."

"Of course. Play or pay, I suppose the old fellow treated your promise as he does his debts—booked it. It's the custom, I believe, in trade."

His friend was annoyed by the sneer. It had ever been his weakness to be considered as a man of fashion. He shrank from the honest industry by which his fortune had been gained, as if there had been a leprosy in labour. Unfortunately there are still many like him.

"I cannot listen to you," he exclaimed; "I have given my word to a kind old man, and this time I mean to keep it. Good-bye; and if——"

"If what?" said the captain, who saw that the words were lingering on his tongue; "out with it!"

"Well, then, if we do not meet so frequently as now, impute it to no lack of friendship—for I shall always like you—but to circumstances and——"

"Your uncle's orders. I beg pardon—request," replied Faddle, who was more annoyed than he cared to show at the sudden change. He had not yet *half-plucked his pigeon*. "I understand. I have had so many transactions in my time with the people, that I am quite an authority in Hebraw lore."

"What mean you?"

"Nothing; only that when peace was concluded they generally offered up a scapegoat for the sins of the people. Farewell; you know where to find me when you want a friend. You see I take the hint. By the bye, what am I to do with this tin?"

"Pay it to my banker."

"What all?"

"All but a thousand pounds," replied the young man kindly, "and that, Faddle, keep as a mark of friendship. I know it isn't much; but, d—n it, you understand me."

"Greenhorn, better let me pay it all; and hark you, Wilmott, as old Squaretoes shells out, schedule me for a couple of thousands; you will gain a thousand pounds by the transaction."

It was an odd way of putting a thousand pounds in a man's pocket, but we dare say our readers have frequently met with men whose offers were equally plausible.

"No," replied his friend, with a half smile, "the old gentleman has behaved most kindly; and it is not at such a moment that I should choose to rob him."

"Rob him!"

"What else would you call it?"

"Any thing else. How often have I told you there is nothing more vulgar than calling things by their proper names!"

"Take the drag, and be off."

"Adieu."

"Adieu."

"Dick," said his master, "when you return, loiter about the house, pick up what you can; servants are always babbling."

"Some servants, sir."

"True," said his master, "it is not every servant who answers to the curb like you."

Dick winced, for he reflected on the terrible import of the word "curb" in the mouth of a man who at any time could hang him.

"See Nancy again, if possible, this evening; make an appointment with her for to-morrow; tell her to bring her friend Rose with her. I shall accompany you to the place of meeting."

"Am I to tell her that?" demanded Dick.

"Certainly not. You have your instructions, obey them. You know I never waste time by giving orders twice."

When Wilmott separated from Faddle, he sought an interview with his cousin Ellen, and poured into her ear the tale of his penitence and love. The poor girl believed him. Humanity is so credulous where the heart is interested, it trusts the thing it wishes. Her pardon was granted even before it was asked.

"Do not say forgive, Richard," exclaimed the affectionate cousin, "for I never felt a moment's anger towards you. I have been wounded by your neglect of late, but never blamed you, for I felt assured it was unintentional; besides, I am not the most cheerful companion in the world."

The young man sighed as he internally acknowledged the truth of the remark, for his cousin was constitutionally of a quiet temperament, and a sigh involuntarily rose at the thought of passing a whole life with her. The poor girl smiled; she fancied the sigh arose from a lover's apprehension for her changing health.

"It's nothing, dear Richard; now that we are likely to be happy, the colour will soon revisit my cheek again. I must live, since my life may be devoted to you. I would linger around you, Richard, soothe your couch of pain; partake of your cares, your confidence; share, if you would let me, in your joys; be your support in sorrow."

The young man was touched with the simplicity and trusting nature of his cousin's heart. With a feeling which was more akin to pity than to love, he caught her in his arms and pressed her to his bosom. To him the embrace was nothing more than an ebullition of a brother's love; to her, it was like the galvanic shock applied to the exposed nerve of a corse—it endowed her with a fictitious life and delusive hopes again.

"This is as it should be!" exclaimed Mr. Briarton, as he entered the room just after the embrace was given, and Ellen, blushing and happy, took refuge from Wilmott's arms in his; "never look so sly, or blush, Nell. Come, when shall we have the wedding?"

"Oh, father!"

"In not less than a month," said Richard; "not less, Ellen, if you love me!"

The young lady sighed, looked confused—as young ladies do when such entreaties are addressed to them. Her hesitation and confusion were but for a moment; she fixed her eyes with a peculiar, sad expression upon her cousin. Her father took the hint and left the room.

"Richard," she began, "you have asked me a question—the most momentous of my life—a question which, if sincerely put, makes me the happiest of human creatures; but which, if not, condemns me to a misery so dark and hopeless, that, much as I have contemplated it of late, I feel my courage shrink from."

"Ellen, can you suspect me of deceit?"

"Hear me. If I have a weak, I have not an ungenerous heart. If this indeed be love, if the feelings, the affections, which have so long been devoted to you, have indeed wakened a return within your breast, repeat your question; and oh, with what joy will I reply to it. If not, in mercy do not trifle with a father's confidence, or a weak girl's happiness."

"Ellen," said her cousin, deeply moved, "will you be my wife?"

Exhausted by her feelings, the poor girl threw herself, with all the confidence of girlhood, into the arms of the speaker, whose heart beat as coldly the while as for a sister, and yet he did not intentionally deceive her; he made a very common error—he mistook gratitude for love.

The next night, true to the promise Nancy had made to Dick, she and Rose met him by appointment at the house of an old woman, well known in the neighbourhood as Mother Mason. She was the confidante, friend, and adviser of half the girls in the vicinity. She lived by fortune-telling really, although ostensibly she took in needle-work. It was a mere blind to her real pursuit.

"So, Goody Mason," exclaimed Nancy, as she entered the little back parlour, "have you heard the news?"

"What news?" demanded the old woman.

"Why Richard Wilmott marries his cousin after all. What become of your predictions?"

"They will hold good," replied the fortune-teller. "Man may lie, woman may lie, the heart may lie even to itself, rumour generally lies, but the cards never."

"You really mean it, then, that she is to marry a poor man?"

"I have said it," replied the fortune-teller, oracularly.

"But Mr. Wilmott, they say, has lost a deal of money; perhaps it may mean him?"

The old woman shook her head. She either had or pretended to have implicit faith in her art.

"And who am I to marry, mother?" inquired Rose.

"I have told you often, child—a rich man, rich in comparison with yourself."

"And shall I be happy with him?" continued the inquirer with a sigh, for her thoughts reverted at the moment to Walter Maynard.

The old woman was about to continue her predictions, when the door opened, and Dick entered the room, accompanied by his master.

"Well, I declare!" said Nancy, trying to look very much surprised; "who would have thought it?"

Mother Mason was not deceived; she saw that they were expected, and her eyes glistened with cupidity; for, as she sagaciously used to observe, "when gentlefolks indulge in vice, there is always money to be made by those who can assist them."

Rose drew her little shawl round her figure, and prepared to depart. She was not pleased at being caught in such a place, for both her mind and knowledge of the world were superior to her station.

"Stay," said the captain; "I came on purpose to see you."

"Sir!"

"Oh, don't be alarmed," he added, with a quiet smile; "*the time has not come* for me to renew my suit. I can wait."

This was uttered in a tone of such calm and conscious power that the poor girl trembled. She had an instinctive terror of the speaker; at the sound of his voice an involuntary shudder came over her, as some gems are said to test, by the change apparent in them, the presence of poison.

"My purpose," he resumed, "is a friendly one, however you may doubt it,—to place you in that sphere your mind and manners would adorn; to give you wealth, station, respect, the means of gratifying those tastes which every daughter of Eve inherits."

"You mistake me, sir," replied the girl. "If I have my weakness, thank Heaven I am not without my strength; and the temptations you set before me would be valueless, were it even in your power to realise them, if purchased at the expense of virtue."

"Virtue!—pshaw! Like vice, it is but a name!"

"That name to me, sir, is every thing."

"And it shall not be sullied," said Faddle. "The church shall have its dues, ere love dreams of its rights. Wilmott loves you."

"You jest," replied Rose, slightly blushing; "he is about to be married to his cousin."

"That I can answer for," interrupted Nancy, who had been committing a violent flirtation in another corner of the little parlour with Dick. "Miss Ellen's own maid told me her own self."

"I repeat he loves but you. Despite the promise he has made to his uncle, give him but the chance of declaring himself, and he is yours."

Rose looked np lnto his face, with an expression which seemed to ask why he took such an interest in the affair.

"Friendship," he replied, reading her thonght.

She sm iled lncredulously.

"Well, then, interest."

This time she believed him.

"Will you walk with Nancy on Sunday evening ln the Temple Gardens?"

"An appointment, sir! indeed I cannot," replied the girl.

"Nothing of the kind, Rose," exclaimed Nancy; "you know it is onr usual place of walking. We scarcely ever fail," she added, significantly to the captain; "so if you choose to come, of course we can't prevent you."

The hint was sufficient. Faddle knew well the influence which Nancy possessed over her friend, and left it to work out his design, bidding Dick to follow him. He left the room, first throwing the old woman a sovereign to consnlt the stars in his favonr against he called again.

"I have already done so," replied the woman.

"Well, what find yon?"

"A youth of pleasure; a manhood of regret; an age of crime."

"Crime!" repeated the young man, startled at the strange reply; "yon are drunk, old hag!"

"Hag!" shrieked the woman; "hag! to one as well born as yourself! Ah, you may stare. I can trace the breeding in a man as well as you wonld the blood in a horse; and I pronounce yours to have been cnrish. *A true gentleman never insulted a woman.*"

"Forget it, mother," said Faddle, trying to langh off the unpleasant feeling her words occasioned; "and here, take another sovereign as a peace-offering; bnt tell me how shall I end my days?"

"Show me yonr hand."

The captain drew off his glove and spread his jewelled hand before her. The old woman took it between hers, and raised it to the light. After contemplating it closely for some time, she let it fall without a word.

"What mean yon?"

"Do not ask me," she answered, with a shndder. "Take back your money."

"Nonsense, woman! Come, a taste of your qnality, as the player says—a specimen of yonr craft. How am I to die?"

"Take back your money."

The captain was annoyed and vexed, especially as the two girls were langhing at him. Dick, who was inclined to be superstitious, drew back from the speaker with an uncomfortable feeling of awe.

"Give me an answer."

"I will not."

Faddle sqneezed her hand till the old woman screamed ont. He was more than irritated—he was getting ferocious.

"By the hands of the hangman, then, since yon will force it," she shrieked ont, "and for the mnrder of a woman."

Faddle's nerves were like steel, and yet they were shaken by the prediction of the old woman, whose manner proved that she at least was a believer in her own powers of prophecy. Vainly he tried to laugh the lmpression off. It clung to him like a painfnl memory or hideous thonght, and long after hannted him, at times even in his dreams. The principal object of his visit was attained. He had seen Rose, and although she had given him no direct promise, he felt assured she would be with her companion at the appointed place of rendezvons. Hastily bidding them adieu, he left the house and made his way, chewing the cud of gloomy meditation, towards his lodgings.

"Hnmph!" exclaimed Nancy, as she looked after him; "yonr master seems to have lost conrage, Dick, at an old wife's game. I thonght your real-bred gentlefolks never believed ln any thing?"

"No more they do," replied the man, "that they ought to believe in. Bnt never mind my master, Nancy; listen to me. When do yon intend to make me happy?"

"Why, really," said the girl, simpering and blushing, "the courtship has been so short; besides, you gentlemen's gentlemen are so exceedingly rackety. How long," she added, struck by a sudden thonght, "honestly now, have you been in love with me?"

The question was a poser even for a fellow of Dick's bronze. Had he answered it trnly, he wonld have replied ever since his master had ordered him. But that wonld have neither advanced his snit with the pretty coqnette or his employer's purpose, so he had recourse to the nsual aid of a rascal in an embarrassment—a lie. Seizing her hand, he exclaimed:

"How long have I loved yon? From the moment I first saw you. Mine was love at first sight; and that, yon know, always lasts the longest. I have long been tired of raking abont; I hate service, and am resolved to settle as soon as I can get a girl after my heart to make me happy. Master has promised me a hnndred pounds whenever I marry; I have saved another; so that, yon see, we shall not commence the world without something to rely upon."

The mention of the two hnndred pounds prodnced a favonrable effect npon Nancy, who had dreamt frequently of being the mistress of a neat public-house. Her ambition had even extended to a horse and chaise. The first, like a prudent girl, she kept to herself—not to startle her admirers by giving them an idea she was extravagant. The latter she might most probably have enjoyed had she consented to become Mrs. Pike. Bnt no! Nancy, like most girls, wanted a handsome hnsband, as well as one likely to do well in the world. She had no idea of being married to be made a nurse of.

What the answer wonld have been it is impossible to say, for, just as she was abont to give it, the door of the room was rather unceremoniously opened, and her mother, father, and old Pike, the overseer, made their appearance.

"There she is!" exclaimed the aged lover, whom jealousy had indnced to set one of the factory lads to watch.

"Nance, why do I find you," said her father, "with that fellow?"

"Because I like him," replied the girl, saucily; for she felt assured of her mother's support, who always made it a point of principle to oppose her husband's wishes in every thing.

"Better listen to Mr. Pike, girl," continned her parent. "He is a respectable man, and can keep you without work."

"Ay, and without pleasnre," observed Dick, who took conrage on seeing how well the girl stood np to have her will. "Look at his spindle shanks! what can he want with a wife, unless to nnrse him?"

"Or you, except to starve her," retorted the old man, stung at the allnsion to his age and infirmities "Why, you have nothing in the world, absolntely nothing."

"Well," replied Dick, saucily, "and Nancy has nothing; so we'll e'en put our two nothings together and begin life upon them. Better a poor home with happiness than a rich one without."

"You are right there, young man," said Nancy's mother, Mrs. Bartlett, who was as indulgent to her girl as she was domineering with her husband. "Love is love, and all the preaching in the world won't alter it."

"Won't it?" exclaimed her helpmate; "we shall see. For one, I am resolved to use my authority. Nance, go home."

"I shan't, father."

"That's right," added her mother, encouragingly.

"Mrs. Bartlett, answer me one question."

"What is that?"

"Is our daughter to marry to please you or me?"

"Neither," said the mother; "but to please herself. I have nothing to say against Mr. Pike; he has a good home to take her to, and can keep her respectably; but he is too old to marry a girl of her age."

"So he is," whispered Dick to his sweetheart, "and too ugly."

The girl smiled approval; and certainly there was no comparison between the withered old man, whose features were as hard as the crabstick on which he leaned, and the handsome, roguish-looking speaker, whose breeches and smart boots set off his well-made limbs to advantage, and gave him that rakish-looking air so fascinating to nursery maids, milliners' girls, and sentimental young ladies.

Pike, seeing that he was not likely to advance his suit by remaining, left the house, followed by Mr. Bartlett, whose courage he had successfully worked up to the braving of his "better-half." Poor old fellow, it was clear he was a novice in love. Had he better known its stratagems, he would have sought an ally rather in the mother than the father; for in such matters it is the mother's influence which generally prevails.

No sooner were they gone, than Dick, whose master had plentifully supplied him with money for the occasion, sent out for fruit and a bottle of wine. Rose and Nancy were easily persuaded to remain, especially as the mother of the latter was of the party. The knowing blade told his best jokes, sang his best songs—plied the old woman so well with drink, and the young one with flattery, that before the evening was finished he had made a conquest of each. The girl vowed that she would never have any other, and her father's better-half promised that he should have no peace till he consented.

"Don't forget Sunday evening," he whispered, as he lingered behind Rose with his sweetheart, to kiss her and bid her good-bye; "master and Mr. Wilmott are sure to be there."

The girl promised, little dreaming that by so foolish an act she was leading her friend to misery, poverty, unhappiness—to all but shame; *that* the natural purity of her disposition, and the love she bore for Walter Maynard, which still struggled against ambition, preserved her from.

On the Saturday evening Wilmott received a note from his fashionable friend, gently reproaching him for his absence from the club, and requesting a meeting for the following evening. It was cunningly penned. On one part a piece of news was hinted at, which the writer knew must interest him; in another a capital joke, retailed against a man who had been his opponent both on the turf and at the gaming table.

"I must go," sighed Wilmott. "I have not quitted the house for three days. I am tired of cooing like a turtle in a cage. Ellen must sometimes ope the bars, or I shall beat to death against the wires. 'Sdeath! what a pity it is," he added, "that duty and inclination seldom run the same course! Had it been Rose, not Ellen, how happy might I——God! let me not think of that!"

At about seven o'clock on the Sunday evening following, Faddle and his victim left the tavern where they had been drinking; the latter, flushed with the juice of the grape, excited by the raillery and wit of his companion, who was as cool and brilliant as the diamond, as collected as the rattle-snake before it makes its final spring. "You are right," he whispered, "to give up Rose. 'Tis true the girl hath charms to tempt an anchorite; but Ellen and her fortune are much better."

"Damn her fortune!"

"Did you ever observe the voluptuous swell of her heaving bosom as it rises and falls with the pulsation of her heart?" added the tempter. "I have often thought it was from such a snowy billow Venus rose, when first old Ocean sent her forth to gladden earth. Walter Maynard will be a happy man!"

"I would sooner see her dead. Hark you, Faddle; if you do not wish to see me mad, speak to me no more upon this subject. The sacrifice I am now bound in honour as well as prudence to make is painful enough—add not the torture of recollections which madden and unman me."

"I thought you a philosopher," answered his friend, with a sneer, although he was secretly delighted with the impression his words had produced.

"And you find me only a man," observed Wilmott; "weaker, and almost as erring as yourself."

"By Venus!" exclaimed Faddle, pretending to be very much surprised, "it is the very girl herself. Who would have expected to meet her here? This way—this way. Ellen, if she hears of this meeting, will weep—her uncle frown. We must not tempt young resolution too far."

"I must speak with her."

"You shall not," replied his companion, endeavouring to lead him away.

The speaker knew well the being he had to deal with; he was one of those whom opposition always inflame and render obstinate. Scarcely had he declared that he would speak with her, than a moment's reflection told him it was wrong. Probably he would have changed his intention, had not the cunning genius of Faddle applied the necessary stimulant.

Rose and her companion were quietly sauntering by the side of one of the deserted squares, where on a Sunday evening a few children only are to be met with; the artizan and tradesman, tired with their week's toil, generally on that day leaving the crowded neighbourhood for the healthy air of Greenwich, or a trip to Chelsea. The fair girl was simply and modestly attired, as became the humble position she occupied in this jostling world, where dress is made the standard of respectability, and wealth of virtue. A plain muslin dress showed her gracefully-rounded figure to advantage, displaying the contour of her innocent bosom; a transparent scarf of her own needle-work hung over her shoulders, as if enamoured of the support, so closely it clung to them; while her brilliant eyes sparkled from beneath the simple straw bonnet, the rose in the lining of which seemed pale beside the pouting ruby of her lips. She blushed deeply as her young master and his companion

approached them, and would have passed on, had not Wilmott detained her.

"Rose," he exclaimed, passionately, "you must not leave me thus. I will speak with you, or I shall go mad. Hear me with patience. Rose, I am wretched."

"Wretched!" repeated the girl, with an incredulous smile; "the world, sir, would scarcely believe you. You are young, gay, rich, about to be married to——" here her voice faltered a little—"an amiable lady. You do but jest with me. Pray let me pass on."

Faddle, determined to give his friend every opportunity of completing his ruin, had drawn the half-resisting arm of Nancy between his, and began his usual protestations of love.

"Let me go!" exclaimed the little vixen, but with an air so coquettish, that it seemed rather to mean, 'detain me if you will;' at least he understood it so.

"Let them alone," he whispered; "your master has something to say to Rose."

"The same tale, I suppose," replied Nancy, "which you would breathe into my ear were I fool enough to listen to you. You fine gentlemen, in your chase after life, think us silly girls as game, and hunt us to our ruin; but neither Rose nor I are of that class, I promise you."

"I know you are all discretion."

"And you all impudence," added Nancy, pushing him suddenly from her, for he had tried to steal a kiss; "in the public square, too!"

The speaker marched on with a quick step till she reached the angle of the square where Rose was listening to the protestations of Wilmott, whose hand forcibly detained her.

"You shall hear me, Rose," she heard him say; "for, despite my intended marriage with another, I love but you. Listen!"

"Listen!" repeated the maiden, scornfully; "listen to a man who gives his hand to one woman, while he professes his heart to be another's! I am poor, sir; fortune has left me nothing but an honest name; the love you tempt me with would wither it in the moment of your caprice and passion. I am like a flower which has caught your eye—a thing you would gather and cast from you. What would then become of me? No honest man would look upon me. My fair name blown upon, my fame destroyed, where should I hide my misery and disgrace?"

"The girl is no fool," muttered Faddle to himself, as he reached the spot time enough to hear Rose's last observation. "It were indeed a triumph to win her heart!"

"By my love," added Wilmott, getting more and more excited.

"Love! the seducer talks of love!" repeated the girl; "does not the word blister your tongue? I beg—I insist that you let me pass."

Just as she was struggling to release her hand from Wilmott's, Walter Maynard, who had missed Rose from her accustomed evening walk, and was returning to seek her, turned the corner. As soon as he beheld her with her young master, he turned pale as death. Many in his situation would have turned away; he, on the contrary, walked firmly to the spot.

"Rose," he exclaimed, "why do I find you in company with this libertine? you know his character—know that many have already fallen victims to his seductive arts. You stand within the tiger's spring; beware its fangs!"

"Libertine!" repeated the excited Wilmott, grasping his cane; "unsay that word!"

"Sir, I am too poor to lie."

"The clown!" muttered Faddle, who rejoiced at the encounter, trusting that it would inflame his companion, and lead him to the accomplishment of his ruin; "why, the cur looks quite rabid."

"Unsay that word!" repeated the exasperated young man, advancing to Maynard, and raising his cane as if to strike.

Fortunately Walter did not lose his self-possession; his countenance, from being pale, became suddenly flushed; he retreated a step, and fixed an eye so full of courage and hate upon his rival, that he paused.

"Back!" he exclaimed; "there are moments which make an humble man forget his station—the difference between himself and his employer. I have been patient while my heart hath withered—patient while its hopes have been crushed by oppression's heel. But a blow would unchain the devil in my nature, and nerve my arm to strike you, master, to my feet."

"I wear no seducer's mask," replied the young man; "my love, like yours, is honest, and to-morrow morning, if she consents, sees Rose Ashford my wife."

"His wife!" repeated the poor clerk, hopelessly; "then all is over."

"No, no," sobbed Rose, whose heart was touched by the deep sorrow of her former lover.

"Don't be a fool," whispered Nancy; "only think, mistress of the factory—wearing silks instead of weaving them, besides the triumph over your enemies."

"And is it thus," exclaimed Maynard, "my love hath been requited? Go," he added, "sell yourself for gold—reject the honest heart which woos, for his who buys you. Your lonely hours, your cheerless home, the stings of a wakened conscience will avenge me."

Without waiting a reply the young man, pulled his hat over his brow, to conceal the tears which his manhood need not have blushed to shed, and walked or rather ran hastily away.

"You consent?" exclaimed the excited Wilmott grasping Rose passionately by the hand; "you will accept the station you were born to ornament—the heart whose every pulse beats for you alone?"

"Of course she will," replied Nancy, answering for her friend, whose agitation was too great to speak; "don't I know her thoughts? hasn't she always loved you?"

The infatuated youth was delighted with the assurance, which was about as false as his own declaration that he had always intended an honourable marriage. The fact was, the pretty Rose was tired, heart-sick of poverty, its privations and vulgar trials. Her lover said truly—she literally sold herself for gold. Time will show whether it made her happy.

"You consent?" demanded Wilmott, imploringly.

"I do."

The transports of the half-drunken wooer alarmed the strangely-won bride, and she repented of the word. The instant it had passed her lips, had Walter but been there that she might have sheltered in his arms—had she had one kind friend to advise or to direct her—the better impulse of her nature had prevailed. It is doubtful whether even the allurement of fortune would have been sufficient, but for the bitterness of Walter's parting speech; that rankled in her heart, for she felt she only half deserved it, and decided her. Poor girl! her revenge, like the sting of the scorpion, fell on her own head.

It was finally arranged that Rose and Nancy should meet Wilmott and his friend at nine o'clock on the following morning to be married at Spitalfields

church. The former thrust a pocket-book into Rose's hand: it contained one hundred pounds. She took it passively—almost reluctantly.

"One kiss," he added, "to seal my happiness; the next shall be demanded at the altar, Rose."

She shnddered as for the first time his lips met hers. They felt like the seal of misery set to her future life. Nancy received her half fainting from his arms.

"So sudden—snch an nnexpected happiness!" she whispered to her master, willing to pnt the best construction upon Rose's manner. "Ah, sir, you will be a happy man."

The fool thonght so—indeed, for a brief time he was so.

Instead of returning to the honse of his uncle, Wilmott and his evil genius returned to the tavern, where the night was passed in drinking champagne, and pledging the health of the intended bride, by the glowing description of whose person, or the joys he would find within her arms, Faddle kept up his dnpe's excitement.

"Ay," hiccupped the bridegroom, "she is indeed a bride for love's own couch."

His companion nodded significantly that he thonght the same.

"Poor Ellen!" he added, as a gleam of recollection reminded him of his unhappy consin.

"Think not of her. She will feel it at first, no doubt; but she may be consoled."

"Never!"

Faddle only smiled.

"By yourself, perhaps?"

"Perhaps."

"Make her a good husband, and I and Rose will dance at your wedding. Come," he added, "no more wine. My brain is on fire, and my heart parched with wine. I must sleep—sleep—or I shall make a sorry bridegroom in the morning."

"Take a cnp of coffee first."

The bell was rung and the coffee ordered by Faddle, whose companion lay in a dreamy state of existence, stretched at his length npon the sofa. As the false friend poured it ont for his victim, he contrived to drop a grain of a powder which he knew hy experience would keep up the feverish excitement of the drinker's blood without affecting his reason. The captain was an old hand at snch practices. At the gaming table he had fonnd the knowledge of them not only lucrative, but prudent.

Dick, who had received the cne from his master, hastened to the house of Nancy, and used so well the blarneying tongue which nature had given him and the world polished, that he prevailed upon her to let the marriage be made a double one, by uniting her fate with his—much to the discontent of her father, whose secret hope had long been to see her the wife of his friend, the overseer of the factory, Mr. Pike.

"Well, Nance," said her mother, after all was settled, and her snitor had departed, "I am afraid whether you have made a right choice or not."

"Why did yon consent, then, mother?" demanded the girl.

"On principle, Nancy."

"Principle!"

"Yes; never to let your father have his own way. Were I once to indulge him, he wou'd grow so insolent upon it, I should never have a will of my own again. Ah! child," she added, "matrimony is something like a twelfth-cake—all the sngar lies at the top, unless yon manage to cut it prudently. Tell me, have yon ever considered how you are to manage a husband?"

"Lord, mother, I thought he was to manage me."

Mrs. Bartlett was struck all of a heap, as she afterwards confessed, at the infamous notion of her daughter. The idea of a woman being managed hy any one was derogatory to her ideas of the prerogative of the sex, above all by a husband.

"Nancy, child," she bitterly exclaimed, "yon never got that notion from me."

"Never, mother," replied the girl, endeavonring to look serious; for she had been trained in too good a school to be the simple! on in the art of domestic government which, to tease her mother, she had feigned.

The rest of the night was passed by Rose and her friend in making snch preparation for the morning as the shortness of the notice permitted. It is astonishing what a little skill with the needle will do. By the aid of a few ribbands the simple dresses of the two girls were made to look presentable for the occasion. Rose Ashford wept bitterly as she sewed the last bow on hers.

The captain's servant Dick was not the most happy person in the affair. The fellow was naturally amorous; the piquant manner and sparkling eyes of his intended bride had made an impression on his heart, and he chafed and fretted like a chained hound to think that he was to go through the farce of marrying her merely to place her in the arms of another. Had there been any means of escape from the disgraceful compact, he would have done so; but he knew the pitiless hands into which he had fallen, and felt he had no resource bnt to follow whichever way his master chose to pull the chain.

Although the marriage took place before nine on the following morning, the rumour had reached the factory, and a large crowd of men and girls were assembled to see the party quit the chnrch. Rose hung her head as the triumphant Wilmott led her towards the carriage. She feared to encounter in the crowd the eye of one whose glance would have been a dagger to her heart.

It was a joyless wedding; not a friend, save the master-fiend who had planned it, to bid the brides "God bless them" on their way. Even the volatile Nancy felt that her spirit was chilled; the anticipation of something dreadful hung over her as she viewed the lngubrious countenance of her husband, on whom Faddle continually kept his eye. Poor Dick felt like a cat who was watched while longing for cream.

"Villain!" exclaimed a deep, stern voice, as Wilmott passed the crowd, whom the beadles kept back on either side.

The bridegroom raised his eyes, and beheld his uncle.

"Go, fair bride," said Walter Maynard, as his eye at last encountered that of Rose; "go, enjoy thy dear-bought splendour; feel your chains until they gnaw into your very heart. When riches pall, and false love cools, think on my curse, Rose—the curse of him whose heart you have broken."

"Hold, Walter!" shrieked the nnhappy girl, as she sank fainting into her husband's arms; "I am cursed already!"

Amid the hisses of the multitude the dashing eqnipage drove off with the two friends and the insensible bride.

Nancy and her precious bargain got into a hackney coach, and went to keep their wedding-day at the

bachelor chambers of Mr. Faddle, where several of Dick's liveried friends had been invited to meet them. As night drew on, the new-made husband became more and more melancholy. It was in vain that his acquaintances, and even Nancy, attempted to rally him.

"If this is a specimen of a husband," she spitefully observed, "give me an undertaker. Why, Dick, you are as dull as a mourning coach."

Finding he must do something to keep up his character, the poor fellow rallied, by a violent effort, and his mirth became even more sad than his previous silence.

"Laugh!" he exclaimed, glaring round the table. "Why the devil don't you laugh? There's mirth in hell to-night—why should there not be here? Damn it, do be gay!"

Several of the guests had left; the bride had previously retired to her chamber; when one of the female friends of his wife informed him that he might also bid the rest of his friends good night.

"Happy dog!" shouted a sentimental looking fellow, who was valet to a peer.

"Very!" sighed Dick.

"'None but the brave'—you know the rest."

He soon will," observed a second.

Good night," said a steady old man, who during the day had scarcely spoken to any of the party, and beneath whose quiet smile the bridegroom had been repeatedly seen to wince; in fact, the speaker was no other than a confidant of Faddle's, set on to watch, lest the atrocious plan he had laid should fail.

"Go to your own room,' whispered a deep, low voice in the bridegroom's ear, as he approached the door of Nancy's chamber; "you will find the price of this day's work upon the table."

Grinding his teeth with impotent rage, and muttering curses, the unhappy Dick withdrew to his solitary wretched couch, leaving the infamous Faddle to supply his place by the side of his expecting bride, who, in the dark, and the confusion which woman naturally feels when first she yields her person to the embrace of man, perceived not the exchange till too late to preserve her honour. The instant she did perceive it she would have sprung from the polluted couch, had not the artful ravisher forcibly detained her.

"Be cool, Nancy," he whispered, with a triumphant smile; "why make all the world as wise as ourselves?"

"Monster!" sighed the agitated bride; "where is my husband?"

"Safe in my bed, while I have been enjoying happiness without alloy in yours. Have no fear for your husband. To prove how devoted a lover I am, at any time, if he grows troublesome, I'll hang him."

"Mean you," sighed the exasperated girl, who began to suspect that Dick must have been a panderer to her shame, "that my husband knows of your having supplied his place?"

"How else, my charmer, think you it could have been managed? Give me another kiss—come!"

So overcome was the unfortunate Nancy by the horror and disgust which Dick's conduct inspired, that, in comparison, Faddle's offence appeared but light. With all her boldness, she was but a child in her knowledge of the world. Shame held her tongue-tied; added to which, she judged, and truly so, that there was little chance of assistance from the man who had so lately sworn to protect her. In her desolation she wept long and passionately. Faddle threw his arms round her half-fainting form, and pillowed her head upon his perfidious breast. Exerting his specious eloquence, he attempted to soothe her sorrow, protested that his existence depended upon her forgiveness, and seeing her smile again:

"You will forgive me?" he added.

"Provided you leave me," sobbed the girl, whose feelings had exhausted her.

"I will do so; but first, one kiss."

Nancy was silent, and only faintly resisted. The kiss he asked for was obtained, a second followed; the bride trembled in his vigorous arms, as he eagerly pressed her again towards him.

"No! no! no!" she shrieked; but it was in vain, her cry was stifled by a shower of kisses, and again the outrage was committed. The first time Nancy was a victim—the second time more than half an accomplice.

On the following morning, at a late hour, she descended to breakfast in Faddle's room, to all appearance reconciled to her lot. Of Dick she took no more notice than of an entire stranger. Scorn and hate had entirely supplied the place of love; for what woman could forgive the cur who on his wedding-night permitted another to supply his place?

"Nancy—Nancy!" he exclaimed, as soon as they were alone, "pity and forgive me!"

The reply was a cold and stony glance of hate.

"If you knew what I have suffered," he added; "how completely I am in the power of that man, that my life is in his hands, and that he threatened to hang me unless I consented to act the villain's part I did, you would forgive me."

"Possibly," said his wife, coolly. "At present I am ignorant how far you are in the power of your master. I must know that before I judge you. Most likely it is some mean excuse."

"By heavens I am!" continued Dick, eager if possible to exculpate himself in the eyes of Nancy "Hear me," he added, lowering his voice to a whisper; "tempted by the devil when pressed by necessity, I committed forgery, and the captain holds the proofs."

"Does he?" said Nancy, her eye evidently flashing with ferocious joy, as the means of revenge presented themselves.

"What mean you?" exclaimed the terrified Dick, struck by the peculiar expression of her countenance. "Surely you would not use the knowledge you have obtained to the destruction of your husband?"

"Husband?" repeated Nancy, scornfully.

"Ay, are we not married!" demanded the poor devil.

"Married and divorced," said the girl, firmly. "Since you have sold me to the captain I shall remain with him. Beware," she added, "how you ever attempt to claim the rights which, like a cur, you bartered! I loved you, Dick," she added, bursting into tears. "Had you trusted me, I would have gone anywhere with you, worked for you, and contrived some means to release you from the thrall of this heartless devil! As it is, I loathe you, worse than your master! Bad as he is, he at least had one excuse—passion."

Dick fell upon his knees, and seizing her hand, begged her to forgive him. He was touched by the poor girl's misery, and hardened as he was in crime, felt a pang of remorse at the disgraceful part he had played. Few men like to look contemptible before the woman they profess to love. His wife shuddered at his touch, and flung his hand from her.

"Don't touch me!" she almost shrieked, "or I

shall go mad! I hate you. You have made me a degraded thing—the laughing-stock of my acquaintance, should it ever become known."

"But it never need be known," said Faddle, as he entered the room in his dressing-gown, and drew a chair towards the table. "Dick! some breakfast. Nancy will take some with me."

Like a madman, the miserable husband rushed from the room. No sooner was he gone than his master approached his blushing victim, and imprinted a kiss upon her pale lips. To do him justice, although capable of any villany where women were concerned, to obtain his ends Faddle never insulted them. He would proffer the last outrage and the most delicate attention at the same time. It is not to be wondered at if a poor simple girl like Nancy yielded to his fascination, and became half reconciled to her fate.

"You will pardon me, then?" he whispered, as he pressed her to his bosom, and imprinted a kiss upon her cheek.

"Yes," sighed Nancy; "but on one condition."

"Any. Name bnt your wish, and I fly to execute it."

"The proofs of Dick's forgeries," said Nancy, calmly; "place them in my hands."

"What to do with them?" demanded Faddle, eyeing her curiously. "Surely you do not contemplate—oh! no, no; such vengeance would surpass even a woman's hatred."

"Would it surpass my injuries?" she calmly replied. "I must have them. I cannot meet his gaze till I am in a position to bid him crouch at my feet—to spurn him if he murmurs—trample him if he resists—in short, to make him feel the degradation he has heaped on me."

"Even as you please, my dear," said the captain. "The papers are, with other private documents, down at my banker's at Brighton. To-morrow I will write for them."

"To-day," interrupted Nancy, resolutely.

"You must go down with me for them, then. What say you," he added gallantly, "shall we take a trip down to complete our honeymoon?"

"And he—that wretch?" said the girl, meaning her husband, although from sheer disgust she could not name him.

"Remains here, of course; we don't want him to mar our happiness."

The arrangement was soon made, and about two hours afterwards the captain and his victim left town. Previous to starting, a fashionable milliner had been sent for, and Nancy attired in a style more suited to her present position. Once or twice during the journey she almost smiled at Faddle's description of some favourite spot they passed upon the road. The fact is, joined to a handsome person the fellow had a fascinating tongue—combined, few women can resist them. Time passed swiftly; they had lingered here and there to admire the scenery, for they travelled in Faddle's own carriage, till it was past banking hours. When they arrived at Brighton they drove at once to the bank—it was closed.

Her companion's vexation was so naturally acted that Nancy never for a moment suspected his delays and anecdotes had been all calculated purposely to detain her, that she might not demand the fulfilment of his promise before he had passed a second night with her at an hotel—a circumstance which, being voluntary on her part, as he should be able to prove, would render any accusation afterwards of violence of no avail. Dick was too useful at present for him to give his wife the pleasure of hanging him; all he could permit her to do was to hold it in terror over his head.

His plan succeeded. The next day, when the betrayed girl demanded the papers, he flatly refused them, and replied to her threats by a sneer of defiance.

"Go to a magistrate," he said. "Who will believe you? You accompanied me freely down here, as the postilions can prove—slept voluntarily with me, as all the house can witness. A magistrate!" he added "Pooh! he would only laugh at you."

"You are a villain."

"And you are an unforgiving little angel. What!" he added, "hang a poor fellow because he could not help himself when placed between compliance with my orders and death! You would never be so merciless. Come, think no more of it; but let us take a drive."

"All alike," thought Nancy; "only there are two now to punish instead of one. I'll keep my promise, if I live, and hang them both."

With this mental resolve, she pretended to be pacified, and went out with her companion for a drive along the shore. A few days afterwards they returned to London.

If Mr. Briarton's rage was great on hearing of the marriage of his unworthy nephew, it was more than equalled by poor Ellen's despair. A month previous she would not have felt it so much. But her cousin had been kinder to her lately. She had listened with the credulity of a woman's fond heart to his false vows of love, pictured a future never to be realised—a home of love—her children's fond caress—her husband's tenderness. The shock was fearful; for several days her reason sank under it, and her life was despaired of. Her aged father watched beside her couch, the image of regret and mute despair. Every sigh which convulsed the bosom of his darling child was a reproach to him for his imprudence in having brought the children up with the idea that they must love each other. Ellen had received the impression but too well; his nephew, naturally perhaps, revelled from it. Had he left things to take their natural course, the result might have been different. This reflection, however, bitter as it was, inspired him with no sentiment of pity for his nephew. Proceedings were immediately taken to dissolve the existing partnership; no expense was spared, no sacrifice hesitated at, and in less than three months the long-standing firm of Briarton and Wilmott appeared in the *Gazette* as dissolved by mutual consent. Wilmott's share, when every thing was paid, amounted to about thirty thousand pounds. Two years previously it would have been sixty. The turf and the gaming-table could best disclose what had become of the rest.

Faddle called upon him the morning after the announcement of the dissolution of the firm.

"Just in time, old fellow," exclaimed Wilmott, holding out his hand, "to say good bye. To-morrow we start for the continent. I can't live with reduced means in the old style, and I hate to do things shabbily. By-the-bye, won't you step up and speak to Rose?"

"Not now. I have other matters in hand."

"A wench or a pigeon?" demanded his friend, with a laugh.

"The latter," replied Faddle, with a knowing look; "Young Lord Blarney, who is just of age, after a long

minority, has promised to dine with me; he is as unsophisticated a piece of veridity as ever it has been my good fortune to encounter. I want a few men—fellows who can look and speak like gentlemen—to dress the table. Will you make one?"

"Don't ask me; I have promised Rose never to play again. No, Faddle, my future career is marked out. I have an excellent wife, who tries hard to reform and love me. The means of an honourable existence are in my possession. After all my folly and extravagance, I owe no man a shilling, and have thirty thousand pounds—no bad thing to begin the world with."

The captain agreed with him, and secretly resolved that a portion of the sum at least should be his, for his luxurious habits and expensive tastes were not to be indulged in without money, and Faddle never had had any fortune, except the good fortune of getting his hand into other people's pockets. Fools through life had been his bankers, and he had drawn cheques on their credulity.

"Positively you won't come?"

"Positively," replied Wilmott; "but as your friends do not meet till eight, you can stay and dine with me, for the last time, unless your speculations or caprice should bring you to Paris."

The invitation was instantly accepted, for Faddle knew the effect which a glass or two of wine would produce upon the mercurial temperament of his friend, who was never perhaps so near yielding upon any point as when he seemed most resolved to maintain it. Unfortunately, there are many like him in the world.

The dinner passed off heavily enough. Rose, despite her efforts to appear otherwise, was sad; the worm of remorse was preying upon her heart; she was no longer the light-hearted, cheerful girl, who rose early to her work, whose merry laugh sounded musically; but a melancholy, moping woman, whose affections had been blighted, whose ambition had proved the ruin of her happiness, and who dared not even indulge in the luxury of complaint.

Wilmott, too, was equally silent. Jealousy, like a gnawing viper, was rankling in his breast; every sigh which involuntarily wrung the bosom of his wife he attributed to her passion for Walter Maynard. He had become ingenious in tormenting himself, and was consequently a terment to others.

"Good," thought his friend; "the poison works as I could wish. Rose will soon, in her desolation, listen to the vows of another."

He was mistaken in his calculations. Born and educated beyond the sphere to which the misfortunes of her family had reduced her, she still possessed a consolation of which misery could not deprive her—the consolations of religion and of prayer. The love which she treasured in the inmost recesses of her soul was too pure and fervent to admit of any lighter passion.

Just as the dessert was being removed, the servant entered the room, and presented several letters to his master.

"Hmmph!" exclaimed Wilmott, discontentedly; "from the lawyer! I thought I had done with those gentlemen; but law is like a chronic disease—there is no shaking it off."

The second was a small packet, sealed with black, and was addressed to his wife.

"For me?" said Rose, as she received it from his hands; "who can possibly write to me?"

The instant her eye fell upon the address she trembled violently, for it was in the hand-writing of poor Walter; who, with a delicacy she ill-merited, had returned her letters, together with the lock of her glossy hair which she had cut off and given him the evening after he had declared his passion, which had been accepted. But with a lingering fondness that he could scarcely excuse, even to himself, he had not sent all the cherished memorial of past hopes back; one little shining tress had been separated from the rest, and that rested in a small locket, concealed near his broken heart.

"Will you not open it?" demanded her husband, with a pang of suspicion.

"Not here," she faltered; "not here. It is time I retired and left you to your wine; I will read it in my chamber. Perhaps," she imprudently added, "it will be better I should read it there."

Without daring to raise her eyes, she staggered from the room, fearful lest some burst of weakness should betray the agony of her young heart—the desolation of her spirit.

"What a *clerk-like* hand!" observed Faddle, maliciously, who felt with instinctive malice from whom the packet came. Wilmott turned pale at the words; for he, too, guessed the truth.

"No matter," he replied; "come! wine, champagne! When a fellow feels dull there is nothing like a glass of generous drink to raise his blood, and mine is as stagnant just now as the waters of Lethe. Would," he added, "I could obtain a draught of them!"

"To make you forget your losses?" inquired his friend.

"To make me forget, rather, the heartburnings and the pangs of jealousy. I burn, I suffer with them. Faddle," he added, "my passion for my wife increases daily. She receives my attentions kindly and submissively; but I am haunted by the damning thought that her love is devoted to another. I have bought, not won her."

At eight o'clock, when his friend rose to depart, as he expected, his host declared he would accompany him.

"And your resolution?" he observed.

"May be kept another time as well. I am dying of the stagnation of my heart. I want excitement; I must, and will have it. Besides," he added, "who knows?—Fortune may for once relent. I may win!"

"To be sure you may, if you venture boldly. With a capital like yours, I would be a wealthy man in three years. Why not you?"

Another large glass was drained, and the two gentlemen left the house for the chambers of Faddle, where Lord Blarney and a few choice spirits were expecting them. Play ran high; Wilmott staked, in the madness of intoxication, large sums—lost in gloomy silence, and won with a loud, boisterous laugh. The young peer, whose over-dressed person and manners but ill accorded with his assumed rank—we say assumed, for in reality he was no other than a confederate of the captain's, well tutored for the occasion—played with consummate skill and coolness. Maddened by repeated losses, the infuriated victim doubled his large stakes, and, at an early hour in the morning, rushed from the table, the loser of twenty thousand pounds. He had, unfortunately, that very morning, received the amount of his share in the factory and business, and carried the notes upon his person. The gamesters were delighted with their success.

"Come," said the dupe, "I am no lord, but I am ready to offer a noble stake—one throw of the dice for ten thousand pounds."

"Be prudent," whispered Faddle, "you are out of luck this evening."

Damn luck!" roared the wretched man. "Brave men fear not to confront ill fortune; resolution will often outstare the hag, or change her frowns to smiles. Ten thousand pounds, my lord."

"I never play so high," coolly replied the young man, "but shall be happy to give Mr. Wilmott his revenge whenever he thinks fit."

"A coward! But I might have guessed as much."

A furious quarrel ensued, at the end of which the speaker was induced to retract the harshly spoken word, but only on condition that the play should be resumed.

"Drink this; it will refresh you."

His treacherous host placed a bumper of wine in his victim's hand; he drank it at a draught. No sooner had he taken it than the wink went round amongst the confederates.

"I have never played so high," observed the pretended nobleman, hesitatingly; "indeed, as a general practice, I disapprove of high play; bnt, to oblige Mr. Wilmott, whose losses entitle him to his revenge, I will for once accede to his request. But, remember, it must be only for one throw."

"It can only be for one," answered the challenger, with a ghastly smile; for he recollected that, of his large fortune, ten thonsand pounds was the only sum he could call his own.

Dice were brought; the peer threw first. The enormous stake, it had been agreed upon, should be decided in one throw. The dice turned up eleven. Faddle was in ecstasies at his confederate's skill.

"Let him beat that," he thought, "if he can."

Wilmott took the box with a firm hand, and threw the cast, which was either to win him the enormous sum of ten thousand pounds, or leave him penniless. There was a deathless silence in the room as the dice fell upon the table. Drunk and mad as he was, even the heart of the player trembled.

"Twelve!" exclaimed the host, as he raised his hand; "you have won."

The tone in which the last observation was made was so ferocious, that Wilmott, under any other circumstances, must have noticed it; but he was too much elated by his success. The money, as all the stakes

had been cash transactions, was instantly paid, and the half-plucked pigeon rushed from the house—a loser only of ten thousand pounds, instead of a beggar.

"The devil must have served him!" exclaimed his host; "but for that one throw he would have been penniless. Damn him—damn him!"

"Come, be reasonable," replied the pretended peer, apologetically; "ten thousand pounds for one night's work is not so bad, after all."

"It's not the gold—it's not the gold—'tis that its owner will escape me."

"You hate him, then?"

"Ay, as men like me only hate. When I first met the fellow he was rich, and condescended to patronise me—made me feel the bitter sting of dependence—won from me the only woman I ever really loved; and I," he added, grinding his teeth with bitterness at the recollection, "was compelled to assist him to her."

"That was the worst part of all. But you are a philosopher."

"In hate I certainly am," replied the captain, cooling down. "No matter, let us divide the spoil. It is not so heavy as we expected; but there is more to come."

The division was duly made, the speaker receiving half the winnings as his share for introducing the poor dupe, and keeping open house. The rest, who were chiefly needy men, whom the gaming table had ruined, divided the remaining five thousand pounds between them. Some were astonished at their good fortune, and resolved to pursue it; but Lord Blarney, who had never in his life been possessed of so large a sum as a thousand pounds, determined to use it wisely, and break off all connection with the gang for ever. The very next week he started for the continent, and from thence to America, where in time, by prudence, he became a respectable man.

The next day, when Wilmott called upon his false friend, he was received with the usual kindness. Although stunned by the magnitude of his loss, the infatuated dupe had not the least suspicion of unfair play. If such an idea had struck him—and probably at the early part of the night it had done so—the success of his last throw, which was indeed nothing more than a lucky accident, had brought him into confidence again. He was anxious to pursue what he called his good fortune, and obtain his revenge.

"So," said the tempter, "you made a pretty affair of it last night. At the very moment Fortune smiled you turned your back upon her. Such an opportunity may not occur again."

"I was to blame."

"Blame," repeated Faddle, in a mocking tone; "call it by its right name—madness. Blarney was excited—irritated—and at such a moment would have ventured every thing. You might have doubled your fortune."

"You really think so?"

"I am sure so. I never saw so lucky a throw."

"The occasion may present itself again," replied the poor dupe. "The fact is, I had taken too much champagne. The infernal wine threw me off my guard. I was nervous—miserable. Could I but once recover the sum which I have lost, I would forsake the gaming-table for ever."

"And seek for happiness with Rose. Pretty poetical idea enough."

"Happiness," replied the young man, "I shall never know again. Have you heard the news?"

"No."

"My cousin Ellen is dying, and I have been her murderer. Not a word; you cannot reproach me more bitterly than I do myself. Rose, too, is pining in her dear-bought splendour. When I reflect how nearly I was last night reduced to beggary and suicide, I tremble like a man who has escaped a precipice."

"Say rather like a fool, who had Fortune's gifts within his reach, yet wanted courage to stretch out his hand and pluck them. Blarney is rich, independent of his family estates in Ireland, which are large. The accumulations of his minority amount to a hundred thousand pounds."

Wilmott was excited by the idea, and fell blindly into the snare. He eagerly proposed that a second meeting should be brought about, promising to act with more decision and nerve for the future, little dreaming that the future to which he alluded was to him beggary and ruin. But all gamesters indulge in similar dreams, which are never to be realised; for the money lost and won at play, while it ruins the loser, seldom enriches the winner. "Lightly got and lightly spent" is a proverb as old as gaming.

After some further chat the friends separated Faddle to take a morning drive with Nancy, who, after the first shock of her degradation, launched into all the follies and extravagance in which the mad passion of her seducer could indulge her, — and Wilmott to return to Rose, whose dejection hourly increased.

"And when do we start for Paris?" she demanded, for she was alarmed at her husband's absence the previous night, and still more gloomy manner in the morning. Unfortunately, she was no stranger to his predilection for the table.

"In a few days, perhaps."

"You fixed Saturday."

"And have since changed my mind."

The meek broken-hearted wife was silent. She felt that she had no right either to complain or influence him. She had sold herself, and received the price. Laying her hand upon her bosom to still its throbbings, she confessed that Walter's curse was working.

Using his knowledge of the weak points of Wilmott's character as the lever to move him to his purpose, Faddle so worked upon his hopes and fears, exciting him alternately by wine, wit, reproaches, or praise, that the infatuated dupe became a constant attendant on the gaming-table, where he was gradually stripped of the wreck of his once splendid fortune, which was divided amongst men whom he credulously believed to be his best friends. But such is the world. How frequently it mistakes intimacy for friendship! Amongst the arrangements which had been made, on the dissolution of partnership between Wilmott and his uncle, were several bills, of various dates, which Briarton had signed. They had been given to his nephew in part payment of his share in the concern. As his losses at the table gradually required it, the unhappy dupe took them one by one to Gripe, the usurer and discounter, who, to oblige him, let him have the money at the very moderate rate of twenty per cent. But then, it must be observed that they had had too many transactions together, and that the signature of Mr. Briarton was considered as safe upon 'Change as that of the Bank of England, otherwise he would scarcely have been so moderate in his charges. The last bill had been discounted about four months after his marriage, and

Wilmott sat moodily in the drawing-room of his splendid lodgings alone. How to raise a supply, even for present use, he knew not. A few days, and the landlord would, in all probability, seize upon all that remained for rent.

"Fool!" he exclaimed, starting from his chair, and pacing the floor with rapid steps; "miserable fool, who has thrown away life's ornament — preferred the weed to the flower! I am mad," he added, —"I must be mad, or I never should have sacrificed to this fearful passion, honour, the world's esteem, my own respect! Cursed be the day in which I first beheld the fatal dice-box, and cursed the false friend who tempted me to my undoing!"

"And who may he be?" demanded Faddle, who overheard the last part of his victim's speech as he entered the room. "Why, Wilmott, man, you grow quite poetical; we shall have you writing an elegy soon. It is useless to regret the past; it is the present men must look to. I bring you excellent news."

'It will be welcome; 'tis long since I have heard any," replied Wilmott, with a vacant smile; "good news and I have long been strangers. What is it?"

"A young Hibernian nobleman, known to be remarkably rich, devoted to play, is to be at Major Hawk's party to-night. I am commissioned to invite you."

"To what purpose?"

"To help to pluck this wealthy pigeon; if fortunate, our share of the spoil may amount to thousands. Come, look up, face Fortune with a bold countenance, and she is sure to smile upon you; it is your pale doubting votaries the goddess frowns upon."

"And how much money will be required?" demanded the unhappy man.

'About eight hundred pounds."

"And I have scarcely as many shillings left."

The tone of utter despondency in which these few words were spoken convinced Faddle of their truth. The victim was plundered, but not sufficiently dishonoured; his name, as an honest man, remained to him yet. He had gradually led him from wealth to poverty—virtue to vice. There was but one step more, and that was crime. He tried to reduce his dupe to his own level; to drive him to a prison, perhaps to suicide, that he might openly enjoy the plunder he had acquired, perhaps share it with his victim's wife.

'That's devilish unfortunate; such another opportunity may not occur again."

"Can you assist me?" demanded Wilmott.

Faddle eyed him for a few moments with a cool insolence, which seemed to express his utter contempt for the penetration of the man he had ruined. Seeing that his companion noticed it, he suddenly resumed his usual careless bearing, and answered hurriedly:

"I assist!—most amusing idea! You know, Richard, that I am poorer even than yourself; my fortune consists in a dashing exterior and no slight knowledge of the world. Fools are my bankers, and I draw cheques upon their credulity. Try Gripe."

"He has discounted the last bill," replied Wilmott, with a sigh.

No one knew this better than the man who had given him the advice to discount another. He knew there was no other—that the last stake had been lost.

"Devilish unfortunate! Could not you borrow your wife's jewels? I told you, when you bought them, you were too liberal; the tin would have been useful now."

"They are gone."

"Raise money on your plate, then. Do something to meet the emergency; such an occasion may not occur again. It was with difficulty I persuaded Hawk to invite you of the party; he is jealous of your play, and says that when you are cool he would stake any sum upon your hand. Can't you raise part of the sum," he added, "on your plate?"

"Gone too."

Faddle smiled. "Your horses—your carriages?" he added.

"Are no longer mine!" impatiently exclaimed Wilmott. "I am a beggar; you know this, and yet you coolly torture me."

"I probe the nerve to strengthen it," replied the false friend. "Listen to me. This young Irishman, whose wealth, inherited from an Indian nabob, Hawk assures me is enormous, is as unsuspicious as he is reckless. He fights shy of the older hands; but your appearance, manners, and name will win his confidence. We can then do with him as we please. 'Tis your last chance in the game of life. Resolve to play it boldly. The money must be had."

"But how?" demanded the bewildered gamester.

"Borrow your uncle's signature," whispered Faddle.

Wilmott started, and looked upon the friend who thus counselled him to his dishonour as if he did not at first comprehend him.

"Borrow my uncle's signature," he repeated slowly; "and is this your advice—this the counsel of the man who has shared my fortune, called himself my friend? Shame, man—shame! Sooner will I first end this wretched, this dishonoured life."

"You can but do that afterwards," replied Faddle, coolly; "you had better take courage and try the tables first: fortune may change. I once knew a man reduced to his last fifty; he staked, won double, and won again. He had evidently made up his mind to a fearful consequence or a glorious success. Eight times he pursued his fortune. To the astonishment of the spectators, and the confusion of the bank, he won each time. Six thousand four hundred pounds was the sum. His hand trembled, and his eye glistened, as he thrust the notes into his pocket, and hurriedly left the room. I followed him."

"For what purpose?"

"There was an old account between us, and fortune had been against me. I asked him to lend me fifty pounds; to my astonishment he gave me a hundred."

"That was liberal."

"No, it was prudent. The only note for fifty in his possession was the one he had originally staked, and that was forged."

"Forged!" repeated Wilmott, with a shudder; "he was a bold man to tempt his fate like that."

"And like most bold men," added Faddle, "he succeeded. Come, what say you? will you accompany me to Hawk's to-night? Damn it, you can make the bill for three months, and before the time expires a hundred things may turn up. We can't both be unlucky."

"And yet we have been so lately," hesitatingly replied his companion, whose imagination was excited by the tale of the forger's success; "but I'll do my best to raise the money; not by the means you propose, though," he added, hastily—"not by such means."

The captain internally smiled at the ill-masked attempt to conceal his purpose; but at that time it was not to his interest to let Wilmott know that he saw through his game. Affecting, therefore, to be

deceived, he shook him cordially by the hand, and promised to return for him in the evening, to conduct him to Major Hawk's evening party.

"The fool!" he muttered, as he descended the stairs to his cab, which Dick was holding for him, "does he think to blind me to his intention? I thought that last tale of the forged fifty would do it. Little does the idiot imagine that I am myself the hero of the tale I told so coolly; but I have ever been of a reckless nature, and should have my jest even with the rope about my neck."

As the light trap rolled along, the idea suddenly struck him that it would be as well to set a watch, and ascertain whether Wilmott really visited Gripe. It was possible that his dupe might possess resources with which he was unacquainted, although improbable.

"Dick," said his master, as they drew up at the corner of the Haymarket.

"Sir," replied the servant, all attention, and touching his hat.

"You know Gripe, the money-lender?"

"As well as the black mare knows the stable—the old bloodsucker. Why, he charged me two pounds ten to cash a cheque which Sir Manx Martin gave me for breaking his colt out of Zephyr. The baronet had crossed it, and I was obliged to put it into his hands to get the money. He would draw blood from a stone, sir, if once he put his lips to it."

"Why, yes," said Faddle, drawlingly, "he is fond of sharp practice; but let that pass. I want you to ensconce yourself in some nook or corner where you can watch the approach of all who go to his house. You understand me?"

Dick replied by a knowing wink; for, notwithstanding the terrible power which his master held over him, he cared but little for slavish respect, and never exacted it unless the poor devil, feeling the curb too hard, ventured to become a little more restive than usual. "I know the very spot, sir; the corner window in the taproom of the Magpie; but who am I to wait for?"

"Mr. Wilmott."

"I thought as much," said Dick to himself, with a sigh of commiseration; for the unfortunate man had frequently been liberal to him, and invariably thanked his services with a smiling look or a kind word.

"Stir not from the spot till he arrives. Note how long he stays—his demeanour—in short, eye him as you would a horse about to start for the Leger, and cast up his points. You understand me?"

"I should have lived all these years to little purpose if I did not, sir," replied Dick. "But supposing Mr. Wilmott should not call there, how long am I to wait?"

"No later than five," replied his master, after a pause. "Gripe would not see a prince of the blood on business after that hour; but he will be sure to call. He must," he muttered internally; "he has no other resource."

Throwing Dick a sovereign to pay his expenses at the Magpie, his master drove to his lodgings in Regent Street, where Nancy, who, from a simple factory girl, had become one of the fastest belles of the day, was impatiently waiting his arrival. Although dressed in the height of fashion, and surrounded by the homage of her protector's dissolute companions, Nancy was far from happy. She was too shrewd an observer of life not to feel that the homage she received was unaccompanied by respect. Men stared boldly at her in the park, and ventured to address her with a freedom which she felt she had no longer the right to resent. When she complained to Faddle, he only laughed at her. The fact was, the heartless libertine was getting tired of his bargain—tired of the expenditure she caused him, and the tears and reproaches which assailed him. Still she was too important an article in his speculations to be got rid of lightly. The novelty of her manners, the boldness of her repartees, and unaffected simplicity, had made quite a sensation amongst his friends, and he determined to resign her in favour of the best bidder. Amongst the number of his acquaintance was a young baronet, named Sir Henry Springer. Although not more than five-and-twenty, and possessed of a handsome fortune, no inducement had ever yet prevailed on him to gamble. Like most country gentlemen, he was fond of racing, and occasionally betted, but never to any large amount. He, like many others, had been struck by Nancy's peculiar style, and became a constant dangler after her in the park, or at Faddle's lodgings, where, under one pretext or another, he was a constant visitor.

"So late—always late!" exclaimed Nancy, pettingly, as her protector, to use the common parlance of the world, entered the room. "You know you promised to drive me in the park to-day."

"Did I?" demanded Faddle, with a slight yawn.

"Yes, you did," added the poor girl, the tears starting in her eyes; "and a hundred other things besides; but, like most promises, forgotten and broken now."

"And what were they?"

"One was to love me," replied Nancy, throwing her arms round his neck, and imprinting a kiss upon his cheek. Oh, Frank," she added, "you know the art, the cruel means by which you won me. The scorn, the contempt of others, I may bear patiently, but not yours, not yours; for whatever I may appear in the eyes of the world, you at least ought to respect me."

"And don't I respect you?" demanded Faddle, whose aim was to pique, not quarrel with her; "have I not introduced you to all my friends?"

"I hate your friends."

"Sir Henry Springer amongst the rest?" demanded Faddle, with a peculiar smile.

"Oh, no; not Sir Henry!" exclaimed the girl, with a grateful smile; "he is the only one who, since my degradation, has never made me feel it; he always treats me as if I were good and virtuous."

"And so you are, Nancy," exclaimed Faddle, who had his own reasons for wishing her to look well; "at least in my eyes. Half the women of fashion who pretend to sneer at you are not half so pure, and far less honest. Pshaw! girl, you and I must meet the world as the world meets us—a smile for our friends, and a frown for our enemies. As for tears, Nancy, we'll keep them for ourselves, should the day arrive in which we have to weep for each other."

Nancy, her arms round the neck of the serpent, whose tongue might have begniled another, rose and hastened to her own room to dress for the promised drive in the park. Never, perhaps, had she looked more charming. There was a gentle languor in her eyes which softened the too great vivacity of their natural expression; even her companion felt their influence, as she frequently turned them upon his handsome countenance, with the fond devotedness of woman's love.

"Who is that you bowed to?" inquired Nancy, as her companion kissed his hand to a lady who was riding alone in a small phaeton, attended only by a single footman.

"That? Oh that," said Faddle, carelessly, "is Lady Clinton."

"You seem on good terms with her," continued the girl, annoyed by the glance which had accompanied the salute.

"Why, ye—es," drawled the libertine. "We are not exactly strangers to each other. The fact is, we were desperately fond for a short time; but I soon grew tired. I hate women who are always fondling and sentimental."

"And I," added the poor girl, with spirit, "men who are as heartless as they are forsworn—who know their power, and feel a cruel pride in showing it. Such men have never loved."

Again the libertine kissed his hand to the lady in the phaeton, who had ordered her carriage to turn, and so contrived to pass him. This time Nancy bit her lips, and was silent. Her heart was too full to speak; nor was that of the guilty occupant of the carriage much happier. Married to an aged but honourable man, she had permitted her heart to wander to another. At first, her struggles to resist the fascination had been successful, and she had broken off all correspondence with the libertine; but the sight of him in the park, with a handsome girl by his side, had so excited her imagination and inflamed her jealousy, that she would have given worlds to speak with him but for one moment. Faddle saw and understood her feelings. Nancy was to serve as a decoy duck till he had won a richer prize, and then he meant to cast her off as worthless. No—let us not wrong him—he was too economical to cast her off; he meant to sell her—sell her to his friend the baronet. There are more hearts sold in this land of liberty than half your philosophers dream of.

Faddle drew his cab up close to the ring, and entered into conversation with a number of sporting gentlemen, amongst whom was Sir Henry Springer, who was driving an elegant new barouche, with a pair of cream-coloured horses. The turn-out was so complete, so perfect in taste, that even Nancy, torn as her heart was by jealousy and love, could not avoid complimenting him upon his choice.

"Why, ay," said the baronet, complacently, "the thing is pretty enough, if its master had but some one by his side whom he loved to share it. A drive round the park, like the journey of life, is miserable when taken alone."

There was a glance of passionate admiration in the speaker's look which did not escape the observation of either Nancy or her companion. The heart of the former trembled; the latter rejoiced, for he felt that his plans were maturing. He should soon get rid of her, and be at leisure to follow up the chase of his more wealthy victim, the unhappy Lady Clinton.

"By Jupiter! but Springer will become a Benedict soon!" exclaimed Colonel Seymour; "he is absolutely talking sentiment and looking poetry. Ten to one he is married before the next Derby."

"Done!" said another eagerly, who was a closer observer of human nature than the speaker, and perhaps saw more clearly into the affair. "Tens or fifties?" he added, taking out his book to record the bet.

"Tens, I think," said Seymour, who, being a man of wealth, cared very little about losing a few pounds; "or fifties if you like. But mark, you will lose—you are forward—take your choice."

"Fifties," said the gent, coolly closing his book after writing it down. "I'll run the risk, colonel, despite your friendly warning. What say you, madam," he added; "do you think our friend will marry before the next Derby?"

"Marry whom he will," replied Nancy, blushing, for she really felt grateful to him for his kind attention, which, never trespassing on the bounds of respect, was soothing to her feelings, "I am sure I wish him happy."

The baronet's eyes and hers met for an instant. The young man read sorrow there, and mistook the expression for love—not the first time a similar error has been made.

"Since you admire my turn-out so much," he quietly whispered, "will you venture to take a drive in it? I am an old whip," he added, "and the horses are steady as lambs."

A decided refusal was upon her lips, when the phaeton of Lady Clinton again passed.

Faddle had no eyes but for her. The kiss of the hand was repeated, and the lady's bow this time most cordial.

"Lucky fellow!" exclaimed Seymour, "to have succeeded where so many failed."

A smile of quiet satisfaction was the libertine's reply. Poor Nancy was furious. The fire of jealousy was consuming her; but, like a martyr, she smiled even at the stake.

"Frank, Frank," she whispered to her companion.

"Well, what is it?" he replied, without turning his head from the direction which her ladyship's phaeton had taken, and which he still followed with his eyes.

"Sir Henry wishes me to try his new carriage—merely for a drive."

"Why not? He is a steady whip."

"You wish me, then, to go?"

"Certainly, if it will give you pleasure; besides, it will enable me to drive after Lady Clinton, to whom I owe many apologies for my neglect of late. Of course I could not do so while you were with me; it would not be etiquette to introduce you."

"I understand the difference," said the poor girl, bitterly, "between the titled mistress who voluntarily throws herself into the arms of a libertine, and the humble girl who has been cheated of her honour. Society receives the first, whom God had given every stay to cling to, and rejects the latter. Both are victims; one of her own weakness, the other of man's crime."

"Nancy," said Faddle, in a low whisper.

"Well?" sighed the girl.

"You would look devilish pretty in a Quakeress's dress. Try it at the next masquerade."

"Sir Henry," exclaimed the heart-broken girl, who hoped by the resolution she had taken to pique her lover, "I will accept your invitation; but, mind, only for one turn round the ring."

"Don't alarm yourself, Nancy," said her companion, laughing. "Springer is too discreet to drive you further. I will but just chat a few moments with Lady Clinton, and meet you here on your return."

So decided a permission gave the poor girl no opportunity to retract. With a heavy heart she descended from the light cab which Faddle drove, and mounted beside the baronet in his elegant baroncho. More than a dozen hands were extended to assist her.

"Good bye, pet!" said her companion, driving off after Lady Clinton. "I shall be back before you return from your drive."

"Perhaps," thought Seymour to himself, for he had long observed the devoted attention paid by Sir Henry to his fair charge. Several gentlemen who

were chatting round the vehicle entertained the same doubt, although they were too politic to express it. The baronet was all smiles as he drove off with the heartbroken, jealous Nancy, whose eyes to the last followed the cab which contained her heartless destroyer. Twice during the drive she passed the phaeton of Lady Clinton. Faddle was seated by the side of the infatuated woman, who thus braved the censure of the world, and sported with her husband's honour. The ruffian—for every man who mercenarily speculates upon the weakness of a woman merits the name—had accomplished the purpose for which he had brought Nancy out. He had excited the jealousy of her ladyship, and led her to compromise herself by being seen with him in her carriage. Deep was the pang which shot through the heart of the outraged girl as she saw the looks passing between the enamoured pair. It was quickly succeeded by a feeling of resentment, and for a moment she secretly wished that Sir Henry would give her an opportunity of breaking a chain whose pressure was becoming too painful for her strength to bear.

"You sigh," said Sir Henry, tenderly, as they drew up for the second time at the appointed place of rendezvous, where Faddle ought to have been waiting for them. "I envy him whose absence can cause you so much uneasiness; although, unlike him, I should not have the heartlessness to imitate it. Shall we take another turn and meet him?"

"No," sobbed the unhappy girl.

"Remain here, then, till he comes?"

Nancy was silent.

At this moment Dick, who had returned from his office of spy upon Wilmott, drove up with his master's cab. Touching his hat with ironical respect—for the rascal had been stung at the bitter contempt and detestation Nancy had treated him with—he informed her that his master had sent him to drive her home, and to inform her that he should dine out, and could not accompany her to the opera as he intended.

"And where does he dine?" she passionately demanded. "I suppose with Lady Clinton?"

"I believe so, madam," malignantly answered the fellow; "at least he left the park in her ladyship's carriage, and sent the cab for you."

"You may take it back. I shall walk."

"Walk!" repeated the man, glancing at her dress, which was unsuited to a pedestrian.

"You have your answer," interrupted the baronet. "The lady is safe under my charge. I shall drive her home myself—that is," he added, respectfully, "if she will permit me that honour."

Dick touched his hat and drove off, whistling as he went. Cradled in intrigue, he was at no loss to see the speaker's game, or that Nancy, enraged as she was with his master, outraged in her love and pride, must fall into it. He hoped that in time she might descend even to him; for, strange to say, since he had seen her in the possession of another, the rascal began to experience for her something as like love as a mere animal nature is capable of feeling; nor was he altogether satisfied with the share he had taken in her undoing.

"Whew!" he muttered. "Nancy flies at high game! Egad! she becomes her feathers as well as if she had been bred in an aviary, instead of being hatched on a dunghill. Master is tired of her; and, like a prudent girl, she has caught the richest of her admirers. Ten thousand a year, at the very least. Some are born to luck, and Nancy seems one of them."

With these words he drove to an hotel where Faddle was waiting for him. His message of dining out was a *ruse* calculated and sent in the hope of exciting his victim to take the step he wished—that of placing herself under the protection of another. Imprudent as Lady Clinton had been, she had too much respect for her husband to invite him to her house. She had contented herself with giving him a rendezvous at her box at the opera, where she had promised to receive him alone. It is not to be supposed that the unhappy lady had either calculated upon the consequence of her rash step, or even for a moment contemplated her own dishonour. Nobly born—reared in fashionable idleness—her mornings passed in perusing the mawkish, sickly novels of the day, her evenings in a vortex of society, or in listening to the enervating strains of the soul-breathing, passionate music of the opera—her heart was unstrengthened by those principles which can alone sustain it in the hour of trial. The seducer spoke of friendship such as poets dream of—platonic love—and the heart's sympathies. No wonder that the weak creature who listened should also fall.

"Well, Dick," said his master, as he drove up, "you delivered my message?"

"Yes, your honour."

"And what reply?"

"She said that she should walk home; and her look was so despairing, so full of grief, especially when she cast her eyes towards the canal, that, damn it, sir, I, whom she would have hung for the trick I had played her, almost pitied her."

"Canal!" repeated Faddle; "pooh! Sir Henry is with her—he is too wide awake for that."

"So I suppose, sir, for he said he would drive her home himself."

"And if he does," thought the wily schemer to himself, "he is a greater greenhorn than I take him to be. Such an occasion may not occur again." Then dismissing the thought of Nancy from his mind, he inquired the result of his orders to watch the house of Gripe for Wilmott.

"Had not been at the Magpie half an hour," replied Dick, "before I saw him coming. I don't know what he could have been after, but he was pale as death—passed the door twice before he ventured to knock; and, when he did so, it was like the sheriff's signal at the door of the condemned cell. He is sadly changed from what he once was, sir."

"Why, you grow quite poetical," said his master, with a smile, for he was convinced from the description that the forgery was accomplished, although his victim, with his usual weakness, had concealed his resolution from him. "You have worked the oracle famously."

"Is that all, sir?" demanded Dick, with a disappointed look; for he had calculated on another sovereign, at the very least, for his day's work.

"I shall be spoiling you," exclaimed his master, as he tossed him the expected gratuity; "it is as bad to pay too well for service as too little; but I think," he added, with a meaning smile, "that I am sure of your fidelity."

The poor devil changed colour, and wished in his heart he had not asked for it; he knew that the speaker was displeased whenever he alluded to the tie between them.

"Any more orders, sir?" he inquired, touching his hat with increased respect.

"None for the present. Be at the opera passage-entrance precisely at eleven, to drive me to a party at

Major Hawk's; and harkye," he added, "go down, in the early part of the evening, and inquire amongst the servants if Wilmott has given any orders to go: bring me word."

The speaker retired to his apartment in the hotel to his solitary dinner, and to meditate on his approaching interview with Lady Clinton; and Dick hastened away to execute his orders.

"I see that you are unhappy," observed the baronet, kindly, to his companion, whose tears, despite her anger and natural high spirit, fell fast at the treatment she had received. "Your companion—protector—pardon if I wound you by the word—is unworthy of your love. Would that mine could replace it!"

"Oh, Sir Henry! I have been cruelly outraged! Did you know my story, you would pity me."

"Without knowing it, I do sincerely pity you. Few of your sex, unless guarded by the vigilance of parents or the observance of the world, can resist the seducer's arts."

"Seducer's!" repeated Nancy; "say rather the brutal ravisher's, who first proffered dishonourable terms—which, poor as I was, I refused with scorn—and then entrapped me into a marriage with his servant, over whom he holds the power of life and death, from some crime—forgery, I believe—which the villain committed."

"Married!" exclaimed the baronet; "are you serious?"

"That fellow who drove the cabriolet is my husband."

"And does he permit——"

"Permit!—he sold me," continued the agitated girl; "sold me, body and soul, to a greater fiend than himself. I was married on the same day as my earliest friend; who, since my fall, despises and rejects me now; though she, too, is not happy. He—my destroyer—as I thought, accompanied the wedding party of Mr. Wilmott on their tour; instead of which he secretly retired to the house where our bridal feast was held. Night came. You can imagine the confusion of a young girl the first time she receives the caress of a husband. Imagine my horror in the morning, when I found that Faddle had, with the wretch's own consent, supplied his place."

"This, indeed, is horrible," exclaimed the baronet, who read in the agony and shame which accompanied her words that the relation was sincere. "Still you love him?"

"I do," at last she sobbed; "for the heart is a strange compound. He soothed me by his caresses—mitigated, by his entreaties for pardon, my resentment. Besides," she added, "what could I do?—where fly for refuge? I had no husband to protect me. I have told you my story, that you might not think me the worthless wanton. I am bad enough—wretched enough—but not so fallen as that."

"I will be your protector, your friend," exclaimed her companion. "To the house of that ruffian you return no more. Hear me," he continued. "From the moment I first saw you I was fascinated with your beauty; but it was not that which won my heart—your sorrows have achieved that conquest. I saw that you were unhappy, and I longed to change the gloom of your young heart to natural sunshine. I ask for nothing at the present time but your friendship. I will be content to visit you like a brother, till time shall awaken a dearer interest in your breast. I have a villa a few miles from town, so secluded from the world that content might make it a resting-place from the storms and passions of life. Stay there as its mistress. Permit me but occasionally the happiness of seeing you."

"No," said the girl, moved by his generosity; "you must not attach yourself to a polluted, guilty thing. In the world you will find one more worthy of your love than I can ever be."

"In its opinion easily," replied Sir Henry, "but not in my own heart—that will ever, ever respect you, and beat for you alone. You shall not refuse me—unless," he added, mournfully, "I am hateful to you. Even then let me have the pleasure of serving you. It will be a happiness even in my disappointment—a consolation even to broken hope."

There was no resisting so much kindness and delicacy. Nancy was of too loving a nature not to feel the manliness of his conduct. It was the first time she had been treated with the respect so dear to the heart of woman from those who love them. Silence, it is said, gives assent, and Nancy was silent. The baronet was too wise to press her for a direct answer, but giving his horses the rein, he left the park, and directed their course towards Windsor, half way between which ancient seat of royalty and London, secluded in its own grounds, stood the retreat he had named. His companion that night slept there, whilst he, agreeably to his promise, retired to London.

Before seeking his destined victim at the opera, Faddle wrote a note in a disguised hand, which he knew would alarm the suspicious of Gripe. He was anxious to complete the ruin he had planned; he longed to free himself of a man whose friendship was an impediment to his future plans—whose necessities might become burthensome to him. That once accomplished, he hastened to the appointed place of rendezvous.

Lady Clinton was alone in her box when the seducer entered. He had attired himself with that negligent care which set off his handsome person. Knowing the advantage of excitement, he had purposely kept her waiting till the close of the second act; and he found her, with the passionate strains of Mario and Grisi still ringing in her ears, seated, or rather voluptuously reclining, on the demi-couch which lined the side of the box, the curtains of which, as if to aid his purpose, were half drawn.

"At last!" she sighed. "I thought you had forgotten me."

"Ay, as the exiled spirit forgets the heaven from which it is driven. But I could not present myself before you till I felt that I was worthy of your love—friendship I should have said," he added, for he saw that the word had startled her.

She was not the first woman who had been led to ruin by the drawing of a platonic passion. The speaker knew her weakness, and drew from it his strength.

"You have dismissed that worthless creature, then?" she inquired, unconscious that the words conveyed a far more bitter censure on herself, who had no excuse for tampering with her honour; but, like many others who are rich, she thought that virtue was only outraged when it yielded to poverty, and the gaunt, hungry pressure of want. The speaker had no pity for such weakness.

"I have—kindly, but firmly. The virtue you have awakened in my heart resisted her tears and pleadings—still they moved me; and now I come to claim my recompense."

The fair aristocrat held out her hand. The burning jealousy which the sight of Nancy in his carriage

had excited was cooled. Her hate was satisfied. Not so Faddle.

"I am one of the patronesses of an institntion for such characters, where they are received till they are reclaimed," she observed. "If the unhappy girl wishes to seek such an asylnm, I will arrange it."

"You are an angel. We will sneak of this tomorrow."

"And you a flatterer."

The approach which the accomplished seducer made was slow but certain. From her hand his lecherous grasp gently ascended to her waist. His deep voice and passionate protestations of a brother's love, aided by the influence of the music, soothed her; her blood for hours had been in a ferment, and the langnor which snceeded was even more dangerous than its fever.

"Take your hand from me," she whispered; "in mercy——"

A kiss, warm and passionate, was the reply to her faintly-nttered prayer. She scarcely resisted him, and his hand fell from her shonlder upon her heaving bosom, which rose and fell with its emotion. There was no one beside themselves in the qniet box; the curtains were more than half drawn; and, emboldened by her unresisting state, Faddle pressed her yielding form yet more closely to his heart. Sighs and tears, followed by ardent vows, succeeded. Half fainting, she sank upon the seat; and her ruin was accomplished.

No sooner was the delirinm over, and the triumphant wretch assnred of his victim, than it required all his eloquence to silence the reproachfnl voice of the gnilty woman's conscience. With well-acted passion he kissed her falling tears; entreated her forgiveness of a momentary error; vowed he wonld banish himself from England, if it would ensure her peace; soothed her like a child upon his bosom; and heartlessly, when he saw that she was incapable of resisting him, repeated his crime again—indnlging in all the fierce delight which such a trinmph gives to those who consult only the gratificatiou of their passions.

"We must never meet again," sighed Lady Clinton, as he bade her farewell in her box.

She could not look at him, but hung down her head in shame.

Faddle smiled. He knew how long her repentance wonld last, and he was not deceived. The following morning she added to her guilt the imprudence of writing to him, bidding him come and take a last farewell before he left England, as he had promised, for ever. *Of course he did not go.*

From the opera, the flush of trinmph still on his cheeks, the libertine drove to Hawk's party, where Wilmott had just arrived in the expectation of meeting him.

"Have you succeeded?" he demanded, as they entered the back drawing-room, which was devoted to play, arm in arm together.

A handful of notes which his dupe produced was the satisfactory reply.

"How mnch?"

"Eight hundred."

"From Gripe?"

"No," replied the wretched man, blushing as he uttered the lie. "I succeeded in borrowing it on the security of a reversionary interest. That game was too dangerous to be tried."

Faddle smiled, and tried to look as if he believed him; bnt he was not deceived.

Play ran high. Wilmott occasionally won, and his temporary success excited him almost to madness; his reverses depressed him to the lowest depths of despondency. Still, so careful had he been of his play, so close his observation of the handling of the cards by his opponents, that at an early hour of the morning he left the house only two hundred ponnds the worse than he entered it; left with a promise of returning the following evening to obtain his revenge, as his host politely termed it. His companion, althongh disappointed, was too wise to permit his feelings to appear.

During the following day, poor Ellen Briarton, whose health was slowly recovering from the shock it had so rudely received, was seated in the drawing-room, when the servant informed her that a person wished to see her—that he would take no denial. He had first inquired for her father, who was absent upon 'Change. Reluctantly she consented to see him, and the usurer Gripe was ushered into the apartment.

"Are you Miss Briarton?" he hurriedly demanded.

The astonished girl bowed her head in token that he had named her rightly.

"Is this yenr father's signature?"

"He produced a bill for a thousand ponnds, drawn by her cousin, and purporting to be accepted by his uncle. She saw at a glance that it was a forgery. Shocked as she was, her woman's heart at once resolved to conceal, if possible, the fatal truth, and she replied in the affirmative.

"Yon are quite snre?"

"I know that my cousin," and her voice faltered as she named him, "has received many such bills lately from my father, in consequence of the dissolution of partnership between them; bnt if you have any doubt upon the subject, I will immediately pay it."

"Pay it!" repeated the astonished usurer; "what! before it is due?"

By a singular coincidence, her father had that very morning passed into her hands the exact sum, the amount of a legacy left her by her aunt. She had repeatedly refused to receive it; but with the fond pertinacity of a parent he had insisted. She now blessed Providence that he did so. Opening the desk which contained the money, she gave him the note, and locked the fatal paper secnrely in its place. At this moment Walter Maynard entered the room, his countenance flushed. Gripe had just spoken to him upon the subject; the inquiry had excited his snspicions, and an examination of the bill-book, which Mr. Briarton had left in the counting-honse, had confirmed them; he knew it was a forgery.

"Yon are right," he exclaimed; "the bill is false."

Gripe stared. In the sordidness of his natnre he could not understand why it had been paid then; but whatever the motive, it saved him a thousand ponnds.

"Leave me, sir," said Ellen, agitated; "onr business, I believe, is ended."

The usurer withdrew, when an explanation took place between the clerk and his young lady, who so wronght npon his better feelings that he undertook to seek out his rival, return the bill on his cousin's part, and warn him for the fnture.

In his way, the hope, the fear of meeting Rose by turns agitated and depressed him. He trembled violently on entering the house, and on seating himself in the study adjoining the drawing-room, looked eagerly ronnd for some memorial of her who was once so dear to him. While these thoughts were creeping over his heart, he was startled by a scream in the next room. He knew the voice. To burst open the door

was the work of an instant. Rose was half fainting on a chair, and Faddle, as cool and impudent as ever, was standing near her.

"Walter!" exclaimed the unhappy woman; "he a witness of this outrage!"

"Young Calico, by Venus!" sneered the libertine; "it seems you expected a more agreeable visitor."

At this moment Wilmott, who had heard the noise, entered the room. The eight of his wife's former lover stung him almost to madness, for he was no less jealous than dissipated.

"Leave the room, fellow!" he said, "nor intrude your presence upon gentlemen!"

"Gentlemen!" repeated the young man, with a laugh, "gentlemen! This scorn to him who holds within his hand the proof which brands you with a felon's name—this forgery upon your uncle!"

He held up the fatal paper as he spoke. Rose was thunderstruck, and her guilty husband so overwhelmed that even his rival pitied his shame and confusion.

"Rose," he added, "was it for this that I was sacrificed — rejected for a cur, a degraded felon, destitute alike of courage and of honour?"

"My husband! spare him, Walter! have pity, and not vengeance!"

"Vengeance—vengeance upon thee, poor broken flower! yes—I will have revenge, such as shall fall like molten fire upon his head—eat like a serpent's tooth within his brain. Such is the vengeance of Rose—of Walter Maynard."

With these words the unhappy lover tore the fearful paper into a hundred fragments, cast them at the feet of the half-fainting Rose, and rushed from the house more like a madman than a reasonable being; it was hours before he could collect sufficient firmness to return to his employment; he had treasured up his secret grief within his heart till it overflowed at last.

"That young man knows but little of the world," thought Faddle to himself, as he reflected on the different use he would have made of the paper, had accident placed it in his possession. Poor Rose, overcome by her feelings, and the regret which the noble conduct of Walter had awakened, cast a look of mingled despair and horror at her husband, and rushed from the room to indulge her tears in solitude and silence.

"Now, then, I am indeed a wretch," sighed Wilmott.

"You are a damned lucky fellow," laconically observed his friend.

"My wife knows of my disgrace."

"Better your wife than the world; besides, a curtain lecture is nothing to one from a judge. Come, cheer up! Remember, you have promised to go this evening to Hawk's."

"No; I have been there too frequently already."

"So most losers say," urged the tempter; "but not those who win. This affair has upset you. Better come with me; a glass or two of generous wine will revive you; besides, it will prevent your meeting with Rose till her anger has abated."

This last argument prevailed, and the poor, weak, irresolute dupe permitted himself to be conducted to a neighbouring tavern, where the intoxicating draught was drained, which drowns reason in the excitement of temporary madness.

At the appointed hour they once more sought the gaming house.

"You are late," whispered the host; "here is a stranger whom I wish to introduce you to; a bird whose plumes are worth the plucking."

He pointed with his glance to a fashionably attired young man, whose manners and appearance indicated a superior rank in life from those around him.

"His name?" demanded Faddle, who was really a stranger to the party.

"Morton."

"Is he rich?"

"As a nabob," replied Hawk, still in the same under tone; "I know that at Lord Rouse's dinner he last night lost a couple of thousands as coolly as you would sport a fifty. Draw him gently, and the game is won."

Soon after the arrival of Wilmott and Faddle, the game commenced, and the young gentleman, whose aristocratic appearance had so excited the hopes of Hawk and his clique, played high, with various success, never betraying by word, or even change of countenance, the least emotion, whether he lost or won.

"A cool hand," whispered their host, as he saw the stranger sweep a bundle of notes from the table. "Faddle, you have met your match at last. Luck has deserted you."

"Are you surprised at that," muttered the gambler, "when you reflect that Fortune is a female divinity?"

"Always railing against women," said an Irish officer who was present. "As poor Sheridan says, no man ever yet abused the sex unless he felt conscious he deserved their hate."

The sneer conveyed in the words, and the general smile with which it was received, stung the heartless man of the world. He had so long been accustomed to render those with whom he came in contact pliant, that he could ill brook a repartee. Although he despised flattery, he wished for it. With difficulty he suppressed the insolent retort upon his lips; but prudence prevailed, for the speaker was not only known as a man of high courage, but had the reputation of being one of the best shots in the kingdom. Like most men who are insolent by nature, Faddle could act like a prudent man.

The game commenced favourably to the deluded Wilmott, who at first was a considerable winner. His daring rose with his success, and he challenged the stranger to a party of lansquenet for five hundred pounds. The sum was so heavy that it attracted attention.

"I never play so high," replied the young man.

Faddle, who had been, contrary to custom, a loser, sneered.

"I hate your cool players," he exclaimed; "fellows who calculate their chances as your mathematicians do their lines and angles. Give me the bold, reckless gamester, who stakes his fortune upon the hazard of the die."

"And lose it," added the officer. "Such men, doubtless, suit you best."

"I fear to lose as little as any man," said the intended pigeon, coolly; "and if the gentleman repeats his challenge I certainly shall not decline."

The challenge was repeated, and despite the pretended remonstrance of their host, who vowed that he could not permit such high play in his house, the stranger accepted, fresh cards were brought, and in a few minutes he and Wilmott, surrounded by the rest of the party, commenced their game. The sum was staked on either side. In three games the latter was a beggar. Despair took possession of his heart when he contemplated his loss. His friend smiled complacently, for he was secretly delighted at his ruin, although not accomplished exactly in the manner he wished. Already he anticipated that Rose would listen to the ungenerous passion which he profaned by the name of love.

"Another game," said Wilmott, livid with rage.

"Stake the money, and I am at your service."

"Is not my word good for a paltry five hundred? Hawk and these gentlemen," added the dupe, "will tell you it has been pledged for as many thousands, and never yet dishonoured."

"Possibly," replied his antagonist, coolly pocketing the large amount he had won; "but I have made a rule never to play on credit."

It was in vain that the beggared gamester sought to raise the sum by borrowing amongst his friends. Men who, but an hour before, had hundreds before them, were suddenly without a guinea; others had forgot their purses. In the mortification of their refusal, Wilmott felt that he was a ruined man. Six months before, and he might have borrowed a thousand pounds upon his cheque. In sullen despair, he rushed to the side-board, and began drinking brandy to drown reflection.

"We shall hear of a suicide before morning," whispered Hawk to Faddle, at the same time glancing significantly towards his friend.

"Damn him—no!" replied the sharper, in the same under tone; "he is a mere sniveller, who has not the courage either to lose or die like a man."

The speaker had been nettled at the success of the stranger, and the perfect self-possession, as well as knowledge of the game, which he displayed. He had long looked upon himself as one of the best lansquenet players about town—a perfect master of palmistry; and he offered to take his friend's place, if the gentleman would condescend to meet him.

"It is hardly fair," replied the young man; "for I can scarcely expect fortune to favour me with a second opponent; but as I have hitherto been a winner, I accept; but it must be on one condition."

"Name it."

"That we post our stakes, and play for a fixed number of guineas—three or five."

"Five," said Faddle.

"Prudence!" whispered Hawk. "I don't half like your customer."

"Agreed!"

"Agreed!"

The sum was staked, and the two gamesters sat down to the table from which Wilmott had so lately risen a ruined man. If considerable interest had been excited by the first match, it was greatly augmented in the second. Men who lately had not a shilling to lend, betted high, and staked their bets—a circumstance which excited little or no remark, for most who were present understood the tactics and friendship of the gaming-house, where the man the least welcome is the one who wants to borrow. It is astonishing with what instinct all try to avoid that man. The plague would be a welcome guest in comparison.

The match was played amidst the silence of the room, broken only by an occasional curse from Faddle, who rose from the table, like his friend, the loser of fifteen hundred pounds. Like Wilmott, he demanded to continue the play, but his antagonist appealed to the company as witnesses of the conditions under which he had sat down. They could not in common decency do less than give it in his favour; on hearing which, he seized his hat, and rose to depart.

"You have been fortunate," observed Hawk, with a bitter smile, for he felt mortified that so rich a booty should have been won, and he have no share in it.

"Why, yes," said the young man, joyously; "this sum," touching his note-case, "will just replace the one I lost to-day."

"At the tables?" demanded several.

"No; by the treachery of a methodistical preaching humbug of a lawyer, who was always counselling me against gaming, but who persuaded me, under pretence of making a fortune, to speculate in American stock, in which I have since found out he was a large holder."

"His name?" gasped Faddle, turning as pale as death, for the news alarmed him.

"Ebenezer Barret," replied the young man. "Do you know him?"

"The villain!" groaned the questioner.

"You may well say that, for it seems he has bolted with his plunder no one knows where. The savings of many a long life of industry and pain, the fortune of the orphan, the pittance of the widow, entrusted by the unsuspicious to his care, have all been sacrificed."

Faddle, who had known the man for years, had, with that blind confidence which sometimes, by a species of retributive justice, leads the plotting villain to his undoing, consigned his ill-gotten savings to him for investment. With each fresh sum the scruples of the scheming rascal had augmented. Frequently had he declared that it went against his conscience to employ money so obtained in the legitimate speculations of commerce; and although he invariably concluded by being persuaded to act as his broker in the affairs of the Stock Exchange, Faddle had to endure a lecture on the immorality of his life, and the unlawfulness, in the sight of God, of his gains. To have been duped by such a plausible hypocrite was almost as galling to his mind as the loss of his ill-gotten accumulations. Like most men who live by cheating others, he was desperate at the thought of having been cheated himself; and curses bitter and fearful broke from his quivering lips at the astounding intelligence.

"Fool!" he exclaimed, "to have trusted to such a villain! I might have known that religion was but the cloak under which he plundered more securely. Leprosy seize him! disease wither his heart! fever drink his blood! Had I the villain in my grasp, I'd wring my gold from his rapacious soul, or trample it out beneath my feet."

"Have you, too, been a loser?" demanded the young man.

Wilmott, whose attention had been drawn to the conversation by his friend's excitement, fixed his eyes upon him, anxious for the reply. For the first time suspicions of Faddle's integrity came over his mind. Ruin often opens the eyes of the dupe.

"Ay," said the desperate villain, now regardless of consequences, "plundered of a sum that would have given me a fresh start in life."

"How much?" inquired Hawk.

"Five——" he was about to say "thousand," but suddenly checking himself he substituted the word "hundred pounds."

"Is this your friendship?" whispered his dupe, who expected to hear a much larger sum named.

Faddle took his arm, and, hastily bidding the party good night, left the house, and led, or rather dragged, his companion with him till they reached the open space before Westminster Hall.

It was about three in the morning; the sky heavy with rolling masses of black clouds, through which, at times, the moon shot a sickly ray, as if loth to shock her chaste light by the view of human crime and passions All was still; none except the houseless or the wretched were abroad that night—but misery keeps all hours, measuring them by its sufferings.

"Five hundred pounds!" said Wilmett, reproachfully; "and fifteen hundred pounds lost to that stranger! Your treachery, it seems, has not profited you much!"

"Treachery!" repeated Faddle.

"What else do you call it? My fortune has been shared with you. You called yourself my friend, and yet, with such a sum in your possession, you permitted—nay, counselled me to commit forgery upon my uncle—subjected me to the felon's doom—to the bitter humiliation of receiving a boon from the being I had most wronged—degraded me in the presence of my wife and that detested Walter. I could have forgiven any thing save that last bitter drop in the chalice of misery."

"The money I lost to-night was not my own," doggedly replied his companion; "would to heaven it had been! my position would have been less desperate."

"Not yours! what mean you?"

"Arlington entrusted me with it to pay his losses at Tattersall's; you know he has left town for the season. I am a dishonoured man. How I am to replace it, heaven knows."

"May I believe you?" said his dupe, half doubtingly; for he knew that Faddle was not unfrequently employed by sporting men in similar commissions—indeed, he had frequently entrusted him in the same manner himself.

"Believe me or not, as you please, I am a ruined man."

"And the five hundred at the lawyer's," said his friend.

"Was mine—all I possessed in the world—the wreck of a once noble fortune. The rascal spoke so frankly, promised such large returns, that, like a fool I trusted him. Had the speculation but succeeded you would have had your share."

"May I trust you?"

"It matters little whether you trust me or no

now that we are both beggars; for, as I stand here a living man, I am not worth fifty pounds."

"Nor I," said Wilmott, "of the tythe part of that sum. All gone—all lost!"

Faddle seized his companion by the arm, and looked cautiously round to see if any one was within hearing. He was fearful lest even the wind which whistled mournfully round the old Abbey towers should overhear his guilty purpose. As the half-distracted man fixed his eyes upon his countenance, he was struck by its horrible expression. His livid features, pale quivering lips, and blood-shot eyes, terrified him. Before the tempter could speak, anticipating some horrible proposal, he shrank from him.

"What is it you fear?" demanded the fiend.

"Nothing—nothing; but you look——"

"How do I look?" demanded Faddle, with a sneer.

"Like the evil one bent on destroying a human soul. Let us go home; to-morrow we shall be both more calm, and can consult what is best to be done. Come, 'tis getting very late."

"I shall not go home," replied the gamester, sullenly, "until——"

"Until when?" inquired his companion, seeing that he hesitated to complete the sentence.

"Until I have recovered the sum of which we have each been plundered. I am convinced this has been a plant; and Hawk," he added, "is the instigator of the whole affair; he knew I had the money. I will have it back."

"How?"

"By fair means, if possible; if not," he whispered, by blood."

"Blood!" almost shrieked the unhappy man; "oh, not by blood! my nights are already sleepless enough, add not murder to my list of crimes. I dare not —will not."

"Then starve!" replied his companion, fiercely; "or worse, live to hear the reproaches of her you love—the triumph of Walter Maynard—the sneer of the worldly wise who envied your prosperity—the contempt of your equals—the pity of your inferiors for the ruined bankrupt gamester."

"Damnation!" exclaimed the unhappy wretch, driven to madness by the picture so artfully drawn.

"Or be a man," resumed the tempter. "One bold act will give us the means for a last hand in the game of life. I tell you we have been plundered—shamefully plundered. Had the fellow but met me on the road, and, clapping a pistol to my breast, robbed me of a shilling, the law would have condemned him to the gibbet. Shall he now escape?"

"But consider the crime—murder—murder," whispered Wilmott, hoping to move his resolution.

"Not unless it proves necessary, though dead men tell no tales."

At this moment a distant step was heard, and a voice merrily humming one of the popular airs from the last opera. It was the young stranger returning from Hawk's on his way home.

"'Tis he," said Faddle; "now, then, prove yourself a man; money we must have, or remember that by to-morrow dishonour and beggary attend us both."

Without waiting for a reply, he drew his infatuated dupe on one side, and began using every means he could think of, such as the despair of Rose, and her more than probable abandonment of him; the sneers of his quondam friends, when they should hear of his utter ruin; pictured the life they might lead upon the continent with the money; their success at the foreign tables, where they were both unknown; and their eventual return to England, rich men. Still Wilmott was undecided—the angel had not yet abandoned him to the dominion of the fiend.

The successful gamester of the evening approached the spot, still humming his favourite air; his mind occupied in those visionary plans for the future which the imagination is so apt to indulge in. Perhaps some dream of love, a happy home, a wife and children, were mingled in his reveries; for there are few hearts which do not contemplate, especially when young, a life of domestic happiness, and the endearing ties which constitute and consecrate it. Let us hope, too, he was repenting of the past. Whatever his thoughts, they were suddenly broken by the appearance of Wilmott, who rushed from his concealment in a fearful state of passion and excitement. The tempter had worked him to his purpose. His lips foamed with rage, and he eyed his victim with the fury of a madman.

"Cheat and villain!" he exclaimed.

"Hard words," said the young man, coolly, as soon as he recovered from his surprise.

"Disgorge your ill-gotten plunder."

"Is that the usual name to give to a gentleman's honourable winnings? Let me pass."

"Not till you have refunded," replied the desperate man, springing towards him.

The party thus attacked saw that the affair was more serious than he anticipated. Stepping back to avoid his assailant, he drew a small pistol from his pocket and levelled it at him.

"It is you," said he, "who are the robber. After having been made the fool, was it I who lured you to the gaming table? was it I who induced you to squander and lose an honourable fortune? was it I who challenged you to play? No. This is an affair to be settled by a magistrate. You shall hear from me in the morning."

Faddle, who saw that the resolution of his companion was wavering, crept, during the last reply, behind him, and catching him suddenly by the arms, held them up in the air in such a manner that the speaker was entirely defenceless. The pistol fell from his hands.

"Strike!" he hoarsely whispered to his dupe; "strike, or live a branded felon."

Inflamed to madness by the last word, and the dread of the exposure which the young man threatened, Wilmott plunged his hunting knife, which he unfortunately had with him, twice in the victim's breast; Faddle stifling his shrieks by holding one hand over his mouth. Then there was a heaving of the chest, a stream of blood, a struggle, and all was over. The two murderers were alone by the corpse of him they had thus suddenly sent to his account.

"What have I done?" exclaimed the wretched man, whose brain reeled at the sight.

"An act of justice," replied his companion, coolly searching the body and drawing from it the pocket-book which contained the notes; "the law strikes the robber—we have but vindicated the law. Stand not thus entranced," he added, "but aid me with the body."

Rapidly raising the dead man from the spot where he had fallen, they bore him down the steps at the bridge side, and cast him into the river. At that moment the moon broke from her sombre veil and cast a momentary light upon the scene, and a voice was heard to halloo from the opposite side of the river. It was one of the Thames policemen in his boat, making

his usual rounds. The culprits hastily fled, nor drew breath till they reached Faddle's lodgings, of which he always kept the latch-key.

"Brandy," groaned Willmott; "brandy, to steady my reeling brain. There is a sea of blood before my eyes; his last groans will echo through eternity in my ears. God! what have I done!"

His companion hastily filled a tumbler with spirit from the sideboard and held it to him. The wretched man approached it to his lips, then suddenly dashed it from him, declaring that the glass was filled with blood, and that he could not drink it. A cold shivering seized him, and, overcome by his feelings, he fainted—the trial was too much for nature to bear longer.

"Fool," said Faddle, contemptuously spurning the body; "with no more courage than a sick girl—not so much wit as a hound, for that, at least, has the instinct of self-preservation. Would I were fairly rid of thee!"

The idea of the necessity of disembarrassing himself of one whom, henceforth, he could regard in no other light than as a clog upon his movements, suddenly struck him. Coolly walking from the dining into the bed-room, he steeped a large towel in water, and, instantly returning, held it firmly for a few seconds over the mouth and nostrils of the insensible man, so as to stop his respiration.

A few minutes and a second murder would have been accomplished, but the villain suddenly remembered that he had no means of disposing of the body; the Thames was no longer at hand, and changing his design, he removed the cloth to the brow of his dupe, and applied brandy to his lips.

"Thanks, thanks!" murmured Wilmott, as recollection returned; "where am I? with you! Oh! Faddle," he added, "I have had such a fearful dream!"

"It was no dream; rouse yourself, and be a man—remember Rose!"

That name seemed to recal his fleeting courage. The thought of her dishonour and despair nerved him, and after a few desperate efforts and a violent flood of tears he rallied to something like composure Their first care was to change their blood-stained linen, which was quickly consumed in the fire in the dining-room, and the remaining marks carefully sponged from their clothes. By this time it was nearly daylight.

"Now that you are once mere yourself," said his friend, "let us examine the pocket-book."

They drew towards the table, and spread its contents before them. Of the three thousand pounds which the young stranger that night had won, fifteen hundred alone remained. Some smaller notes, to the amount of five hundred pounds, which he had evidently been speculating upon, were most of them endorsed with the name of Hawk.

"Damn him for a rascal!" exclaimed Faddle, his eyes glistening with fury as he saw the name. "It is as I expected—the old plant, dressed and feathered; the decoy bird has been plumed to deceive us. Stay, here are some letters. Perhaps we shall learn who the gay spark really was."

Several of the letters were in a delicate female hand, and breathed the deep devotion of a woman's heart when she really loves—loves against hope and reason. They were replies to promises of a speedy amendment, and contained passionate protestations of attachment; they were signed "Marian."

"Burn them," said Wilmott, who could not bear to look upon them; "they may betray us."

"The first sensible word I have heard you utter to-night."

Thrusting them into the fire, he coolly stood by and watched them till the last fragment was consumed.

"Now, then, for the pocket-book," he added; "that, too, might tell a tale to hang us."

Before consigning it to the flames, he once more searched it narrowly, and discovered a secret pocket, carefully hid by the lining. Hastily tearing it open, he found a lock of bright chestnut hair, and a note in the well-known hand-writing of his dear friend Hawk. The latter was carefully read, while the former was cast contemptuously into the flames.

"Right," said Faddle; "I could have sworn that I was right, and that Hawk was in the plot. See here, the scheming rascal warns him to assume his most aristocratic airs—to play coolly—show no eagerness—and above all, not to play a single game on credit; concluding by adding that the game was nearly up, and the pigeons plucked.

"That I should have been so duped!" he continued; "I that knew the utter worthlessness of the man—knew that in France he escaped from the galleys, and dared not show his face in a single watering-place in Germany. No matter, we will have a sure revenge."

"Not by a second murder," observed Wilmott, shuddering; "I have had enough of blood already."

"Pshaw! you are a milksop. But in this case set your mind at rest: the law shall be our executioner and avenger."

"What mean you?"

"To let Hawk suffer for this night's work."

"But how,—what chance—what hope—what likelihood—to give a colour to the charge?"

The finished man of the world eyed the speaker with ill-disguised contempt. The blind folly with which he had permitted himself to be ruined by his artifices had given him so mean an opinion of his understanding, that it almost destroyed the pleasure of his triumph.

"Nothing more easy. We left the house nearly an hour before the dead man."

"Well?"

"Hawk was seen, on his quitting the house shortly afterwards, to follow him."

"By whom?" demanded the astonished Wilmott.

"By Dick."

"By your servant? why you have not seen him since our return."

"But I shall see him," replied Faddle, coolly. "The fellow was waiting for us with my cab. Being warm and excited with play, we walked home. Now do you understand?"

"Imperfectly," replied the bewildered man. "But how will that account for his delay?"

"Oh, the rascal remained chatting with some nymph of the pave. We shall not fail for want of reasons."

"But will Dick swear to this?"

"Dick will swear to any thing I wish. Think you I am such a novice as to keep a fellow near my person who either hears or sees but as I bid him? Not quite so green as that. And now that your scattered wits have once more returned to their deserted nest, here, take your share of our recovered cash, and away with you at once. I have much to do yet, since my brain must toil, I see, for both of us. This will be the worst night's work for Hawk he ever made. The fifteen hundred pounds for which he sold us shall hang him—hang him."

"But have you no fear?"

"None."

"No remorse?"

"Still less. The world has used me like a cur. I turn upon it when I can. Let me see you by one o'clock; my plans will be then matured. But, above all, be cool and collected. Let no weak tremor, no girlish sinking of your heart, betray you. Remember," he added, seriously, "the stake for which we now play, if lost, must be paid upon the gallows—a pretty *finale* for Richard Wilmott, the once wealthy merchant, and his accomplished friend Frank Faddle!"

The speaker carefully descended the stairs, followed by his companion, whom he let out of the house as secretly as possible, after a cold shake of the hands; for he felt it was useless longer to keep up the appearance of friendship. Experience had taught them both this bitter truth, that honour is the soul of friendship. The vital spirit fled, nothing remains but to bury the worthless carcase.

"So," said the master of the lodging to himself, as soon as he regained his apartments, "Fortune has played me one of those slippery tricks with which she delights to overturn the best calculated schemes. Five thousand pounds gone, through that canting rascal! No matter. While there are fools in the world I need not despair of replacing it. Instead of pining over my loss like a boy, I must set about retrieving it like a man. Courage and resolution often recover the game which despair would give up as lost. This night's work has at least given me the means of once more trying the hazard of the die. Lady Wilton, too, is another winning card. All is not hopeless yet."

Lighting his cigar, he continued to pace the room till Dick made his appearance, when he immediately entered into a familiar conversation with him, gradually leading it to the subject he most dreaded, yet wished to bring it to. It was not long before they perfectly understood each other; but this time the servant had the better of his master, for he stipulated that the proof of the forgery he had years before committed should be given to him—positively refusing, upon any other conditions, to second his design of implicating Hawk in the murder. Faddle reluctantly found himself obliged to yield the point.

Next morning Dick, who was sauntering—*of course by accident*—near the river side, heard from a knot of gossiping old women and men that a murder had been committed over night, and an inquest was at that moment being held at the sign of the Green Dragon, in the Westminster Road. Having nothing to do, he made the best of his way to the house, and went into the room where the jury were viewing the body, which was laid out upon a table for their inspection.

"An ugly mark," observed one of the men, pointing to the deepest of the two gashes in the breast of the unfortunate victim. "This will prove Old Bailey work, or I am mistaken."

"Perhaps it is a suicide," observed another.

The coroner shook his head doubtingly. To his experienced eye the wounds were not the work of a self-destroying hand. Besides, he had heard the statement of the Thames policeman.

"Good God!" exclaimed Dick, with well acted astonishment, "if it is not the gentleman I saw last night leave Major Hawk's party! Well, how singular!"

Every eye was turned to the speaker, who was directed by the coroner to attend him to the jury-room.

"Now, my good man," said the functionary, as soon as the court was opened, "what do you know of this melancholy affair?"

"I? Nothing."

"You said just now that you saw the deceased leave the house of a certain Major Hawk."

"And so I did."

"Who is Major Hawk?"

"A gentleman. He keeps a gay house—a sort of club. In short, gaming is carried on there."

"A very suspicious locality," observed the coroner. "And pray what were you doing there?"

"Waiting for my master and his friend, Mr. Wilmott, with the cab."

"And who pray, is your master?"

"Captain Faddle, a gentleman well known upon the turf. He has horses at every race, from the Derby to Goodwood. I thought everybody had heard of Captain Faddle."

Several of the jury had heard of him, and one, a noted money-lender, inquired, rather suspiciously, if the captain left before or after the deceased.

"Before," said Dick, boldly, for he had been well instructed in his replies.

"You did not drive your master home, then?"

"No, sir; he was in a precious ill-humour. I heard him say to his friend that he had been done out of fifteen hundred pounds by some stranger at lansquenet. When I drew up, he damned me for a fool for not having put the cloth on the mare, and said, as he was hot and excited, he would walk home through the park to cool himself."

"And why did you remain," demanded the foreman of the jury, "after your master had given you such an order?"

Dick simpered and tried to put on a bashful air, began to speak, and then hesitated.

"Answer the question," said the coroner, sharply, "or I shall commit you."

"Because I—I——"

"Because what?" impatiently demanded the functionary.

"Well, if I must speak the truth, I had a girl in the cab with me—only to talk to a bit, and—but I hope you won't tell master, he would be so angry—that detained me."

This was stated with such an air of truthfulness and simplicity that both the jurymen and the coroner were satisfied. They smiled at the poor fellow's confusion, and took down his words.

"And how soon after this did you see the deceased leave the house?"

"About an hour."

"You then drove home?"

"No I didn't. I stopped a few minutes to bid the girl good night. Just as I was driving off, I saw Mr. Hawk, muffled in his cloak, leave the house and follow him towards the Hall."

This statement, so naturally made, drew attention to Mr. Hawk, of whom, after Dick's description of the sort of house he kept, neither jury nor coroner entertained a very favourable opinion.

The bill-discounter, however, was not so easily satisfied. He demanded, as the night was so dark, how he had been able to identify Mr. Hawk if he was muffled in a cloak.

"By his black whiskers," replied the witness.

"What! in the dark?"

"Oh, there's a large lamp over his door, with 67 on it."

"And you then drove home?" inquired the coroner.

"Instantly."

"And how long was it after you arrived," continued the questioner, in his blandest voice, the same with which he had thrown so many witnesses off their guard, "before your master returned?"

"Lord bless you, sir, he was at home before me, a good hour at least. I found him and Mr. Wilmott quietly smoking their cigars in the dining-room over a glass of grog. By the same token the captain damned me—asking pardon for the word—for not having laid the fire before I went out. He had been obliged to light it himself to make the water hot; and gentlemen, you know, dislike trouble."

After a few minutes' conversation between the coroner and the foreman of the jury, the inquest was adjourned till the following day, and summonses dispatched for the attendance of Captain Faddle and Mr. Wilmott. A policeman in plain clothes was sent to watch the house of the unsuspecting Major Hawk, over whose devoted head a storm was brewing he little dreamt of, and was still less prepared to meet.

That same afternoon Mr. Sharp, the money-lender, waited upon Dick's master at his lodgings.

"It is no use, Sharp," exclaimed Faddle, as soon as he saw him. "You are come about the old story, I suppose—Bruton's bills? But though I introduced him to you, I gave no guarantee. I have been out of luck lately, most cursedly. And you have no legal claim upon me."

"Of course, captain," said the man of discount, "I have no legal claim; but as the money went to satisfy a gambling debt between you, I at least possess a moral one, which, upon a little reflection, I think you will feel inclined to honour."

"Why so?"

"Simply because it is a moral one. I should not have troubled you had I not been hard pressed for cash myself. Indeed, it was only by accident I heard this morning from your servant, who gave evidence before a coroner's jury, upon which I had been summoned, that you were in town, and so I seized the occasion to wait upon you."

The speaker's eyes and Faddle's met; not a second word was exchanged; in an instant they understood each other. The latter felt how dangerous it would be at such a moment to have an enemy on the jury so well acquainted with his antecedents, and eager to do him all the injury in his power. His mind was made up directly how to act.

"Well," he said, as if considering, "it is devilish hard that you should suffer through your confidence in me. Suppose we split the difference, Sharp, and end the transaction?"

"Can't afford it, captain," replied the man, who felt sure of his game. "Times are bad with me. I have lost more by my confidence in the promise to pay of others, than you have risked upon the turf. I must have my money."

"How much is it?" demanded the secretly-enraged gambler, with an attempt to smile.

"Two hundred pounds."

"Well, call in an hour, and it shall be ready. Bring the bills with you."

"You will not disappoint me?" said the money-lender, significantly.

"Honour!"

"All right, captain. I don't think this time you will break your word. By the bye, what a very intelligent servant that is of yours!"

"Very!"

"Damn him!" thought his master to himself.

"Gave his evidence in such a straightforward manner! You must find him quite a treasure! By the bye, you, I think, are summoned to the inquest?"

"Yes, yes; not that I know any thing about the affair," coolly answered the murderer; "but I suppose I must attend—damned inconvenient though. I was to have gone down to the Epping steeple-chase to-day to Lord Brookton and Wilmott; but I must put it off."

"It would be most prudent," observed his visitor, with a smile, for the quiet manner of the speaker did not deceive him. "Good day; in an hour I shall be with you."

"And in an hour I shall be ready," blandly answered Faddle, as he bowed him to the door. "If, however, by accident, I should not have returned, wait for me. Make yourself at home."

"I will; thank you. Good day."

"Good day."

And the speakers parted; the discounting rascal chuckling at the chance which had procured him the payment of the long-disputed bills, and the yet more worthless villain secretly cursing the accident which had given the other a hold over him.

At the time, to the very moment, the money was paid and the bills given up.

"Damn him!" said Faddle, as he left the house; "Fortune has served me an ill trick to-day. No matter. Perhaps the old flirt will relent, and show a smiling face to-morrow. Now then for Wilmott," he added, "to pour a little of my resolution into his craven heart, nerve him to meet the scene which will try his nerves and wring his courage. Should he fail I shall have lost deal, and the game will then be up with both of us. Pleasant to hang in company with such a nincompoop!"

The next morning, just before the commencement of the inquest, a smart phaeton, containing the captain and his friend, drove up. Dick, whose evidence, like his master's, was required, entered the house where the coroner was about to sit, leaving the carriage in charge of the groom, who rode with him in the dicky behind.

Faddle nodded familiarly to Mr. Sharp, who had already taken his seat in the jury-box. Shortly afterwards, the proceedings commenced. Wilmott was pale as death—his companion as cool and collected as when calculating the odds or booking a bet at Tattersall's. The former was the first who was examined.

"You knew the deceased?" demanded the coroner.

"But slightly," was the reply. "I met him two evenings ago at a party at Major Hawk's. We were introduced, but I can't recollect even his name."

"Did you play?"

"We did."

"And lost?"

"To the tune of fifteen hundred pounds, which I paid him in Bank of England notes."

"It was a large sum," observed the foreman. "Do you remember the number of the notes?"

"Perfectly—50,137, 5821, and 111,000. I make a rule invariably to take the number of every note I receive above fifty, for fear of accident. I have them set down in my pocket-book."

This was partly the truth, only that, with a devilish forethought, he had given the number of the notes still missing, and which he doubted not would be found in the possession of the man whose life he had coldly resolved should be sacrificed to pay the penalty of his crime.

A note was made of the numbers of the notes by the coroner.

"You left the deceased at the party?" said the functionary, as soon as he had finished writing.

"I did."

"About what hour?"

"Between two and three in the morning. My friend Wilmott and I walked through the park to my chambers, and consoled ourselves after our losses with a quiet cigar."

Wilmott's evidence, who had been instructed what to say, was the counterpart of his friend's. Their statement, coupled with Dick's, who was re-examined, tended to cast so grave a doubt upon the share which Hawk had had in the transaction, that the coroner instantly granted a warrant for his arrest, and an officer was dispatched with it, accompanied by a second constable from the neighbouring police-station, armed with authority to examine the house in search of the fatal notes. The court adjourned once more till their return, the witnesses being directed to remain in the neighbourhood till called for.

Great was the surprise of Major Hawk when he found himself taken into custody upon a charge of which he knew himself to be guiltless. No sooner was he brought before the coroner than he began to minster loudly at the indignity offered to a gentleman of his respectability, and talked of an action of redress

"It will be time enough," said the functionary. coolly, "to talk of actions when you have cleared your self from the heavy charge hanging over you, which. for your own sake, I trust you will be able to do. You knew the deceased?"

"Slightly."

"At what hour did he leave your house? Recollect yourself."

"About a quarter-past three. But what of that? I can prove that he did leave it alive and well. Am I responsible for the safety of my guests?"

"We shall see," resumed the coroner. "Did you leave the house after he had quitted it?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure."

The firm tone in which the answer was given only prejudiced the unhappy man's case yet stronger in the minds both of the jury and the coroner, who saw no reason to doubt the evidence of Dick, which had been given with an apparent artlessness which might have imposed upon an Old Bailey jury itself.

"Indeed. Pray, did you play with the deceased?"

"No."

"Did he pay you any money during the night?"

"Not a shilling," said Hawk, who was anxious to conceal the confederacy between them, and dreamt not that the notes were lying in the desk of the speaker.

"Then how came these notes," demanded the functionary, holding them up to the astonished gaze of the accused, "in your possession?"

Hawk was silent. He felt the fearful position in which his prevarication had placed him, and his blood ran cold with terror. In imagination he already felt the hangman's hand upon his neck. Every eye was fixed upon him. Faddle, with a cold, sarcastic smile, enjoyed his confusion. He hated him for the successful manner in which he had outwitted him.

"The numbers," resumed the speaker. "are sworn to. The notes were paid by Captain Faddle to the unfortunate deceased, in your house, to satisfy a gambling transaction. The evidence on that point is positive. If you have any observation to offer, now is the time to speak; but let me caution you that whatever statement you make, will be taken down, and used against you upon your trial."

The caution, like most cautions given under similar circumstances, was made when it was too late to retract the error into which the accused had fallen.

"They were left with me for security," faltered Hawk.

"You denied it just now," observed the foreman of the jury.

"Did any one witness the deposit?" demanded Sharp, the money-lender.

"No one."

"Did you give any acknowledgment for the receipt of them?"

"No."

"And you really expect us to believe that so large a sum as fifteen hundred pounds was deposited with you without a receipt or the presence of a witness?"

Hawk felt that the affair was growing serious, and he requested that the inquest might be postponed till he could obtain the assistance of his professional adviser.

"I think," observed the foreman of the jury, "that it is unnecessary to keep me and the gentlemen engaged upon the inquest any longer. The evidence is sufficiently clear, and our minds are made up."

"Quite," added Mr. Sharp, who had an appointment with young Lord Squander, to arrange an affair in which he expected to reap a large per centage.

"Remove the prisoner," said the coroner to the officer who had Hawk in charge.

The unhappy man was conveyed into the adjoining room, protesting his innocence, and casting imploring glances towards the jury, who regarded him with that cold, stony look, which indicated minds made up to the verdict they were about to return.

The consultation was brief; a verdict of "wilful murder" against the major was returned, and the warrant made out for his committal to Newgate When Hawk was brought back, and informed of the result, the courage which had hitherto sustained him entirely forsook him, and he alternately cried like a child, or passionately protested his innocence.

"You can prove it, then, before a jury of your countrymen," observed the coroner, "where it is my painful duty to send you. After the evidence I do not see how the gentlemen on the inquest could arrive at any other conclusion. I perfectly agree with them."

The astonished Hawk was instantly conveyed, amid the hootings of the mob, to a cab, and driven off to Newgate. The night previous he had slept on a luxurious couch, the next was passed in a gloomy cell in a prison. Bitterly did he curse his fate, and wish that he had never left the path of honesty in which he had been reared. A hundred times he had escaped from charges affecting his life; something whispered him that he was now doomed to fall beneath one of which he was innocent. Such is often the retributive justice of Heaven, whose laws, like those of nature, are seldom outraged with impunity; both avenge themselves.

"Hawk looks devilishly down upon his luck," whispered Faddle to Wilmott, as they drove rapidly from the house where the inquest had been held. "It's a hard game—playing with sharps against me."

"Poor wretch!" said his companion, with a shudder, "I pity him."

"Pity him! damn him! a shark! have I not stood his friend when all else deserted him—backed his character with the endorsement of my acquaintance till it passed like a bank note?—and to set a plant on me! Shall we have a window to view the execution?"

"Frank," exclaimed his companion, "if you do not wish to make me hate you, contrive some way to save him. I cannot see him perish on a scaffold for my crime—my heart would wither at the thought."

"With all my heart. There is one way to do it easy enough."

"How so?" eagerly demanded Wilmott.

"Take his place. Only you must excuse me if I decline to bear you company. I am not yet tired of life and its wild enjoyments; besides, I have a match against Fortune, and intend to play it out. You can do as you please—only don't spoil my game by your cowardice."

The unhappy man was silent. Deep as was his remorse, the natural love of life prevailed, and he urged the subject no further. Since the night on which he had stained his soul so deep in crime, a change had fallen both on his heart and mind. He loathed the pleasures in which he had so lately delighted, bitterly deplored the past, and was determined, with the wreck of his former fortune—and it was but a wreck—to retire to the continent, and lead a new life. This resolution, for many reasons, he kept for the present to himself. His faith in the friendship of his companion was broken; he feared as well as hated him. As soon as they arrived at the West-end they parted coldly.

"Damn him!" muttered Faddle, with a vague feeling of regret that he had not completed the attempt upon his life, which, on the night of the murder, our readers will recollect he had commenced. "He only wants to fall into the hands of some psalm-singing rascal, to make a clean breast, and die penitent. I must keep a sharp look-out, or he will peach at the last. If I could only engage him in a boat race or a swimming-match, I'd soon settle him. It may be done," he added; "it must be done—my safety demands it, and before that consideration all others vanish."

That very day there had been a "drawing-room,"

and the opera was consequently attended by a galaxy of beauty and fashion—many of the ladies wearing their court jewels and dresses. Lady Wilton, as usual, was in her box: on such an occasion it was impossible that she should remain all the evening alone, or receive a visitor whose *entrée* in the exclusive circle in which she moved was not as well recognised as her own. A hundred times during the evening Faddle's eyes were directed imploringly towards the box. A glance, which he well knew how to interpret, assured him that its fair owner shared his impatience, and he determined to wait till the ballet commenced before he made an attempt.

The curtain had fallen amid the cheers and plandits of the stalls and gentlemen of the pit, and Jenny Lind been twice called before the curtain to receive the usual shower of bouquets, and make the same graceful, quiet curtsey, when Lady Wilton rose, to all appearance to depart. For a few seconds she stood in the centre of her box, bowed to one or two female friends, and, turning her back to the stage, walked, not out, but to the back of the box.

The seducer perfectly understood the manœuvre, and a smile of triumph lit his cold features as he beheld it. Experience had made him too skilful in reading the heart not to understand by her actions her wishes and thoughts.

"Where off, Frank?" demanded a young lordling, as the gambler left his stall; "to the club?"

"Rather the bower of Venus. Don't detain me, my dear fellow, I am waited for."

"Happy fellow!"

"Why yes," said the captain, as he settled his gloves and wristbands, "I am tolerably happy. The fact is, I am a philosopher; content to take the world as I find it, not as poets have painted it. I sigh neither for utopian virtue or utopian pleasures; there are realities enough in life for me."

With these words he left his stall, and made his way through Fops' Alley to the circle, in which her ladyship's box was situated. The box-keeper, a grey-headed old man, whose life had been passed in the duties of his office, opened the door without a moment's hesitation, although Faddle had not been more than three times in the box. He already looked upon him as a privileged person; experience had made him learned in all the symptoms of an intrigue; he could detect a declaration in the manner of presenting a bouquet, and had been known to guess pretty accurately the period in which either a marriage or an elopement would take place. He was quite a chronicle for the affairs of the opera—knew the history of every *prima donna* for the last fifty years—could tell how many fortunes she had received—how many hearts broken—and generally dated his events from the rise or fall of some fresh idol of the temple in which he was an humble but observant minister.

"Parsons," whispered one of the underlings, who was looked upon, however, as a rising young man, "is there any thing in that quarter, think you?"

He pointed significantly to Lady Wilton's box as he spoke.

"I can't say," replied the old man, diplomatically; for hitherto her ladyship's conduct had been so very reserved, and she was the patroness of so many religious and charitable societies that he almost feared to doubt her. Still he had his suspicions.

"Who is that gentleman?"

"His name is Faddle," said the young man; "a great man upon the turf."

"Faddle," repeated the aged official, with something like an accent of contempt for the unaristocratic appellation; "I have no such name on my list. Lady Wilton's is the only box to which he has the *entrée*. Hmmph! ha! yes. What were you asking me?"

"If you thought there was any thing between them," whispered the young man, who held his companion in the greatest veneration, and was rewarded for his flattery by a confidence which old Parsons gave to few, for he was as chary of his anecdotes as a lord in waiting or a professed diner-out.

"If he hands her to her carriage, and she takes his arm in the crush room," said the old box keeper, "you may set him down for some relative or friend of her husband's; for it is only women that are innocent who are so imprudent as to neglect appearances—guilt always studies them. If he leaves the box first, the young rascal is a happy fellow, and Lord Wilton a——"

"A what?"

"A husband," said the Ulysses of the lobby, "and we all know what that means."

The speaker was not far wrong.

When Faddle entered the box he found its fair occupant seated on the couch at the side, so screened by the half-drawn curtain that it was impossible for any one from the front of the house to observe if the seats were occupied or not. She was a lovely creature, and her full voluptuous bosom gently rose and fell with the music, and the thoughts which filled her breast. A deep blush suffused her cheek as her seducer entered her box; but it was not the blush of shame or remorse for the honour of her indulgent husband betrayed—the stain she had cast upon her innocent children: it was the flush of lawless passion, when desire runs frolic through the veins, and the imagination indulges in anticipated pleasure.

"You here!" she sighed; "I thought you had forgotten me."

"Forget you!" repeated Faddle, with an air which he intended to be sentimental, and which, to do the fellow justice, was not badly acted. "Can the wanderer from Eden forget the paradise he lost? I have endured agonies to-night. I have seen others flattering round you, yet dared not to approach; knew they were basking in the light of your beauty, drinking the rich music of your voice, whilst my heart ached to listen to it. You seemed so happy."

"Did I?" whispered her ladyship, reproachfully; "it only shows, then, how the heart may school the countenance. I may smile, Frank—may mingle in the world again, for I have duties yet to observe—but I shall never be happy again; never—never; I have sinned too deeply, too hopelessly for that."

The few natural tears which followed were called forth by the recollection of her husband and her children, whose happiness had been so cruelly compromised by her imprudence.

Faddle, although startled at the burst of penitence, was too old a stager to be easily deceived. The agitation and voluptuous languor which were visible in her person when he entered, told a different tale; he was too politic, however, to contradict her; he did better—he kissed her tears away.

"Fear not," he whispered; "there is not the slightest fear that my imprudence—for the crime was all my own—will ever make you unhappy by a discovery. In two days I quit England for ever."

"For ever!" repeated her ladyship, and he felt her form tremble as it half reclined within his arms.

"I have been cruelly used," he resumed. "Without being rich, I possessed a handsome competency. The treachery of a friend in whom I confided has so involved me that I must retire to the continent."

The infatuated woman, whose resolution but a few moments previously had been of atonement, and the breaking off of her dangerous intercourse, felt sick at heart at the intelligence. She felt that she could endure any thing rather than be separated from the man who with the possession of her person, had obtained such uncontested mastery over her mind.

"What is the amount of these losses?" she demanded.

"To some a trifle, but to me enormous. I must sacrifice a property worth three times the value to meet them."

"The amount—the amount?" she exclaimed, impatiently.

"Three thousand pounds."

He almost trembled as he named the sum, fearful of overstepping the mark by mentioning an amount beyond her power to obtain. Had he known that the unfortunate dupe of his feigned passion possessed in her own right no less a sum than fifty thousand pounds, over which she had the sole control, he would not have been so moderate in his indirect demand.

"You shall have it," she hastily whispered, "by to-morrow at three o'clock."

"Lady Wilton!" he replied, trying to assume an air of offended dignity, whilst his heart secretly beat with joy at the success of his well-planned scheme of working on her feelings.

"You must take it," she added, hurriedly, "as the token of a sister's regard."

"Never!"

"You shall. Any thing sooner than part. Hear me, Frank," she continued; "I can procure this sum, if, as you profess, you regard me with a brother's love, you will accept it. Surely you will not deny me the first, and perhaps last, request I may ever make you?'

"Alas!" exclaimed the hypocrite, with a sigh, "you see to what love has humbled me; you know your power over me—know that I live but in the light of your beauty, for from the sunshine of your presence all would indeed be dark and lone despair!"

These and similar rhapsodies were repeated, till the unhappy Lady Wilton, who now began to be lost to the shame of her passion in its violence, found herself once more locked in the serpent-like embrace of the mercenary seducer. About five minutes before the curtain fell he rose to leave the box, his whole countenance radiant with triumph and success.

"Where shall I send the money?" she whispered.

"Bring it," he replied, at the same time imprinting a kiss upon her lips, which made the blood once more course through her veins. "You have my address. I will be at the door ready myself to receive you. Promise me."

"I do promise you," she replied; "but remember, it must be for the first and last time."

As the speaker was in the habit of visiting the poor, and attending the committees of several benevolent institutions of which she was a patroness, her leaving the house on foot, or dismissing her carriage in the park, would not be likely to excite observation amongst the servants, most of whom had been in the service of the family for many years, and were much attached to their noble master, whose kindness was as boundless as his confidence; and both were equally abused.

"This is something," said old Parsons, the box-keeper, as Faddle, after making his adieus to her ladyship, made his appearance in the lobby; "he does not hand her to her carriage; and see how flushed he looks! Poor Lord Wilton! But what can old men expect when they marry young wives?"

Five minutes later, and the fair mistress of the box descended to the crush-room, where she was sure to find some friendly arm to conduct her to her carriage. Her countenance was pale from the excitement she had undergone. To her terror and astonishment, her husband met her on the staircase. She dreamt not that he was in the house; indeed, he seldom troubled his wife's box with his presence, his political duties detaining him elsewhere.

"Why, my love," he exclaimed, "I thought you had left the theatre long since, or I should have intruded upon you. But you look ill!"

"A wretched headache," faltered the guilty woman, her heart beating violently at the thought of the danger she had escaped. "For the last hour I have been trying to get rid of it, but in vain."

Carefully enveloping his frail partner in her satin and point lace mantle, he conducted her to her carriage, dismissed his own, sat and rode home with her.

"You must not go to the opera so frequently," said her husband, as soon as they were seated; "the music excites you too much. You have such tender nerves, a breath irritates them."

"It is nearly gone now—the air has revived me. You may close the window of the carriage. A walk in the morning will perfectly restore me. Can you accompany me?"

"Impossible," said her husband. "I am on two committees, and I promised Lord Splutwell to meet him there; but you can go without me."

"Yes—but," pontingly replied her ladyship, who well knew the impossibility of his accompanying her.

"Yes, but what?"

"You are never at leisure to go anywhere with me. I hate politics," she added.

"And so do I," replied her husband, "if they make you frown. But come, the season will soon be over, and you know that in the country I am all your own."

His wife listened with a sigh to the observation that the season would soon be over, for she knew that its termination must separate her for months, at least, from the man who had obtained such mastery over her feelings, that it induced her to forget, not only her position as a wife and a mother, but the modesty as well as dignity of her sex.

The next morning her ladyship, coquettishly attired in an elegant morning dress, entered her well-appointed carriage, and drove to her banker's. The man of money bowed and smiled, as men of his profession generally bow and smile to those of wealth and rank. A slight rising of the eyebrows marked his surprise of the large sum for which she signed the cheque, for Lady Wilton was by nature rather economical than otherwise. Having so large a balance, of course he did not permit himself the least observation. The money was instantly handed over the counter in six five hundred pound notes, the numbers of which were carefully entered in the note-book, for fear of any accident.

"Good morning!" said the peeress, smiling, as she placed them in her note-case. "It is not often I

draw so largely, but I have a purchase to complete, which I intend as a surprise to my lord."

"Good morning, your ladyship," replied the banker, secretly blessing his stars that his own wife was not troubled with any such expensive tastes.

From the bank she drove to the park, and there dismissed her carriage, under pretence of walking in the inclosure, ordering it to wait for her in an hour's time at her milliner's, a fashionable lady's general place of morning call.

"Bless her!" said the old footman, who had lived so long in the family that he almost felt himself to form a portion of it—"some work of charity, I'll be bound. We have a good master and mistress, John."

This was addressed to his companion, a tall youth from the country, whose simplicity, however, was not so easily imposed upon. Being a young handsome fellow, he had been too well initiated by the ladies' maids and the society of his brethren of the shoulder-knot, not to believe implicitly in all he heard. He was with her on the evening when she met Faddle in the park, and imprudently drove with him in her carriage round the circle. The expression of his incredulity, however, did not venture beyond a knowing smile. Mrs. Agatha, her ladyship's maid, had the reputation in the servants' hall of being equally charitable and devout as her mistress, and he *knew* how well the character she had obtained served her as a cloak for the indulgence of her passions. It is astonishing how soon a young man's eyes are opened in London, especially if he happens to be six feet high and good-looking.

From St. James's Park the peeress hastily crossed into the Mall, and made her way up the Haymarket to the lodgings of her paramour. Her veil, of thick Brussels lace, was closely drawn over her countenance to avoid recognition; not that it was likely, at such an hour, she would encounter any of her female friends; still the precaution was not unwise to avoid being recognised As she approached the chambers, Faddle, who had been impatiently awaiting her at the window, descended, and the private door was open before she had time to raise her hand and knock.

"I have kept my promise," she exclaimed, breathless with terror; "there is the money. You know I promised, dear Frank, that your sister would bring it you herself."

"Sister!" he repeated, "you are an angel; but I cannot thank you in the streets. Come in."

"Impossible! Should any of your servants recognise me."

"I have sent them all away."

"Any of the other inmates," she urged, prudence struggling with desire.

"There is no other person in the house. The upper part is mine, and this the only staircase. Do not hesitate, unless you wish me to consider that your visit is of charity, not love. I am not so fallen," he added, "as to accept an alms even at your dear hands."

"Alms—charity! Oh, Frank, you know how you wring my heart by these unkind reproaches! You know that I am devoted to you—that I am a wife and mother! Well, I will come in, but remember it must be the last time. Do not abuse my confidence."

The tempter smiled as he heard the words "last time." He knew that when a woman has once yielded her honour to the man she loves, there is no last time. She has fallen down a precipice, from which there is no ascent, and, like a wreck caught in the eddies of a whirlpool, must follow the blind impulse of her passions.

"Now will you take the money?" she exclaimed, offering him the note-case, which was inlaid with her arms and coronet; "it is the offering of a sister's love to a brother's necessities."

"As a loan, soon to be repaid," said the deceiver, gladly pocketing the gift, case and all. His quick eye had observed the cyphers and blazonry, and he thought that it might one day be useful to his purposes.

"Oh, Frank!" she resumed, "we had such an escape last night! my lord was in the house. Fortunately, from the half-drawn curtains of my box, he imagined I had left; had he entered it by any chance —I tremble even at the supposition—what would have been my fate? disgrace—infamy!"

"We must meet there no more; my chambers are more convenient. And here," he added, "is such a pretty key, it seems intended by Cupid for a lady's keeping."

He forced into her hand a highly ornamented key of cut steel, which had served the same occasion with more than one whom he had betrayed and abandoned. The countess resisted: her pride was hurt at the idea of coming voluntarily to the lodgings even of the man for whom she had sacrificed her honour, and it required all his entreaties and well-acted despair before he could prevail on her to accept it.

"And now, then," she said, rising as she spoke, "I have fulfilled my promise and must leave you."

"Not before you have seen all my treasures. I have some pictures in the adjoining room."

"Nay, Frank."

Although the libertine had no love for the deluded woman, he had a strong animal passion. Her voluptuous person was suited to his taste, and he felt a secret pleasure in possessing a mistress whose race dated from the Conquest, and whose virtue had been impregnable to all but him.

Throwing his arms around her, despite her faint resistance, he drew her into the adjoining chamber, his eyes sparkling with triumph and desire; there, despite her tears and protestations, he so excited her, that her marriage vow was again forgotten in the fierce desires of unlawful love.

More than two hours had elapsed before she left the house. The carriage had been a long time waiting at the milliner's. John the footman smiled to himself as he remarked that the shawl of his lady was worn on the reverse side to that when she left the house.

"She is mine!" muttered Faddle to himself, as he stood at the window, watching the receding steps of his victim; "mine, body and soul! past all recal. She loves me with that passionate love which knows no pause between gratification and destruction. Let me see; three thousand pounds! No bad beginning for the recovery of my fortune: in six months it shall be ten. I wonder how she obtained it! by asking her husband? Pooh! that were too good a joke! Her diamonds—ay, it must have been her diamonds. Fortune send that she has more of them! If that idiot Wilmett were but once disposed of, my mind would be at rest."

Soon afterwards he took a drive in the park, where he encountered Nancy and Sir Henry; the latter smiling with happiness and love—for the poor girl, touched by his delicacy and kindness, had consented to his wishes; the former, saddened by the recollection of the past, which had left a blight upon her heart.

"How devilish pretty she looks!" muttered her be-

trayer to himself; "pity she was so expensive, or that Lady Wilton was so jealous!—though that," he added, recollecting the three thousand pounds, "was not the worst part of the affair."

"Good day, Sir Henry."

The baronet coldly inclined his head. He was too well bred to cut any man without an explanation.

"Pretty horses those," continued the libertine. "Ah, Nancy, child, how do you do? Delighted to see you."

The girl turned her head aside. Her heart revolted at the sight of him; and yet she loved him still. But his heartless betrayal, and evident intention of abandoning her, had roused her natural pride.

Faddle saw the movement, and hit his lip with vexation. Strange to say, he preferred her to his more noble conquest; but interest had prevailed over passion, and he resigned her, as he would have done his own soul to the fiend, had he but bid up to his price. He was determined to mortify her.

"Which rides easiest?" he demanded, with a sneer, "the old cab or Sir Henry's curricle?"

Nancy burst into a flood of tears.

"This is unmanly," exclaimed the indignant baronet, drawing up his horses, for during the conversation they had been, much to his annoyance, driving side by side; "take your course, sir; neither I nor the lady wish to be insulted by your observations or society."

"The cut indirect, eh?" said the ruffian, pale with rage.

"Direct," resumed the nobleman, "and if you wish to know why, your dastardly treatment of this lady will inform you of my reasons."

"Dastardly!"

"It was my word. I seldom recal it."

"You shall hear from me," muttered Faddle, stung by the haughty cool tone of the speaker.

"Hear from you?" repeated the baronet, with an air of amused surprise. "Why, man, I owe you nothing."

"But satisfaction."

"That my servants shall administer, if subjected again to your annoyance. Farewell, sir. When next you presume to speak to a man of honour on the subject of satisfaction, take care that he does not know you as well as I do. The amusing knaves we meet in each society as alone I have encountered you, may be the companions of a debauch, nodded to in a steeple-chase, or recognised after they have plundered us at the gaming-table; but they are not our equals. The horsewhip, and not the pistol, best settles our account with them."

With these words the speaker lashed his high-spirited horses, and dashed on, leaving Faddle pale with rage and mortification. He had been humbled; not before Nancy alone, but several gentlemen, who, hearing the loud tone in which the baronet spoke, had stopped their horses, knowing them both, to listen to the quarrel. Muttering deep curses and vows of revenge, the ruffian drove away.

"Rather cool that," observed Lord Simper, who had been one of the party.

"Very proper," observed Colonel Lennox, a fine old officer of the Guards: "these fellows think, because we allow them to win our money, that they are to be hand and glove with us everywhere. Who the devil is the fellow? Faddle—a fitter name for a poodle than a man. What's his family? For my part," he added, "I would as soon take a horse without his pedigree as an acquaintance. Sir Henry has shown a proper spirit to decline his challenge. As the girl made a wise exchange, he at least will use her as a gentleman, not like a sharper."

Such a word from the colonel's lips was enough to damn the character and position in society of any man; for he was one of the most distinguished leaders of *ton*, as well as a personage upon the turf. Several who heard him mentally resolved to cut the acquaintance of Mr. Faddle.

About six weeks after the scene in the park, the trial of the unfortunate Major Hawk took place at the Old Bailey. Dick and Faddle gave their evidence with imperturbable coolness against him; and despite the declarations of his innocence made by the unhappy man, the jury and judge were both so convinced of his guilt, that he was condemned,—as many an innocent man has been on evidence less positive. The Monday fortnight after the trial was fixed for the execution. Wilmott's state of mind was pitiable. He neither ate nor slept. It required all the eloquence and fearful threats of his accomplice to prevent him from avowing their mutual guilt. At times Faddle so trembled for his own personal safety that he bitterly repented the non-completion of the second murder which he had contemplated the night of the first.

"Hast then no courage?" he demanded, contemptuously, of his trembling accomplice.

"I have a conscience," replied Wilmott.

"So hath every fool. Some men discard it as a useless burden,—a trammel on their energy and action. Conscience! The man whose doom calls forth this wondrous sympathy hath a hundred times in his career merited the gallows. His soul is as black with crime as if it had been steeped in hell for ages. What matter whether his forfeit life is taken for our misdeeds or his own, so it is forfeit? Why, a woman's nerve would shame thee."

With this and similar arguments he stifled the loud cry of conscience in the breast of the unhappy man whom he had first plundered of wealth and then of honour. Wilmott's reason was not convinced; but the love of life was strong. Each night he resolved to make a confession which would save the victim, and each returning morning the sentiment of self-preservation prevailed over the penitence of the night. Poor Rose, meanwhile, passed her hours in bitter tears. The restless broken slumbers of her husband alarmed her; he would start at times from his sleep, and frantically declare that the hangman's hands were choking him. It required all her prudence to keep his ravings from the ears of the servants, and all her patience and gentleness to soothe him. Her only consolation was her son, a beautiful infant, three months old. As she pressed the little cherub to her maternal breast, she felt that life had still one link left—that she was not quite unhappy.

The morning before the execution she was pacing the floor of her lonely drawing-room, pondering over the days of her girlhood, and the bright promise which it gave. Perhaps the pang of regret for her broken vow, and tender thoughts of Walter, were in her heart, for her cheeks were bathed in tears.

"Thus ends my dream of happiness!" she exclaimed. "I have sacrificed my woman's faith, and the truest heart that ever beat, for one who never loved me."

"Never!" replied a low voice behind her.

She started. Faddle was in the apartment; he had entered it unperceived. Her pale cheek flushed with the indignant blush of shame and anger; for they had

not met since the day when, transported by passion, he had attempted to accomplish his lawless purpose by force. True, he had since apologised, pleading intoxication as his excuse.

"You here?" she murmured.

"Ay. In tears, my sweet friend? I would I could remove the cause. Wilmott is unworthy of your love. Act, then, like a woman of spirit, and transfer to another the heart of which he is unworthy."

"Indeed!" replied Rose, with a sarcastic smile; "and to whom?"

"To me. I long have loved you—lived but in your presence—and——"

"Hold, sir!" said the unhappy woman, firmly. "Whatever my husband's perfidy to me, he has been your friend, companion, benefactor. His fortune, while it lasted, was yours—his heart was open to you as his hand. And now you would repay him by that nameless stain! Oh, shame, man, shame!"

"Think of your injuries," added the libertine, approaching nearer.

"Back, sir! My injuries require neither advocate nor avenger, least of all in thee. I cannot speak the loathing of my heart—its sickness, when I look upon thee. For know," she added, "there is not on the earth a wretch from whom such a declaration would not disgust me less than thee!"

"You are a woman—and all women love revenge—and so I shall tell Wilmott," said her visitor, coolly; for he saw that in her present disposition it would be useless to urge his suit any further. "By the bye, where is your husband?"

"You best can answer that, since he has been out at the gaming table, I suppose, all night."

Faddle felt alarmed. He had not seen him, and conscience whispered that he might, in a moment of remorse, have said something to save Hawk, and compromised them both. Before he could reply, however, his fears were relieved by the entrance of his dupe, or, as he called him, friend. Rose was alarmed at the pale haggard countenance of her husband, and, with a feeling of kindness and pity, was advancing towards him, when, with an impatient churlish gesture, he restrained her.

"What now?" he demanded.

"And is this my welcome, after being all night absent from your home?" sighed the unhappy woman; "but I have no right to complain. Caprice, not love, led to our ill-assorted union; the unsteady passion o'er, the gaming-table, the false friend and dice—any society rather than hers you swore at the altar to love and cherish! Oh! Richard," she added, "if not for my sake, for our child's——"

"Pshaw!" brutally replied her husband; "I am tired of these scenes; the wealth I have squandered has been my own; *your fortune has not been sacrificed!*"

The sneer which accompanied these words roused the bruised spirit of the suffering woman. Love for him she had never felt; the sentiment had not been stronger than gratitude—now it was changed into contempt.

"Ungenerously urged," she exclaimed; "my fortune was unsullied purity of heart, sweet peace of mind, and dreams that promised happiness. Give me back these, restore to me the faith I violated, the heart I have broken, and take again the gilded misery for which I sold myself."

"Enough of this, Rose," said Wilmott, assuming a more temperate tone; "I have been ill of late, and sickness does not improve the temper; bear with me but a little longer, and this cloud upon our fortunes will pass away. I was fortunate last night."

"The devil you were," said Faddle; "where did you play?"

"At Horton's."

"How much?" coolly demanded his friend.

"Seven hundred pounds. Rose, you shall take charge of them: should I die, or retire, as we once thought, to France, the money will be useful."

"Fool," whispered his tempter; "with such a sum you might yet redeem all. Fortune smiles at last, and you shut the door in her face."

Wilmott would have recalled the gift, but it was too late—Rose had already placed the note-case in her bosom. With his usual vacillation, her husband had not the heart to ask it back.

"Now leave us, Rose," he said; "I and Frank have some affairs to settle."

The broken-hearted wife obeyed him in silence; for a project had suddenly entered her head, which she resolved to execute. The fearful dreams and ravings of her husband had filled her with a terrible suspicion. In vain she tried to dismiss it from her mind; it was constant to her as her shadow, and only left her when sleep closed her weary eyes upon her pillow at night, to return to her when she opened them in the morning. Opening into the room where she had left her husband was a small drawing room, seldom used, which had a second entrance from the staircase. Stealthily returning upon her steps, she opened the door and applied her ears to the keyhole. She felt as she did so that the act was wrong, but the doubt which haunted her was agony, and, at all risks, she determined to be convinced.

"That was a devilish lucky hit," said Faddle, "last night, and a good use you have made of it!"

"At least a kind one; it may purchase her gratitude."

"But not her love," said his companion, in an almost melancholy tone, for some painful recollections seemed to cross him; "gifts cannot purchase that. In my young days, when my heart was warm and pure in comparison to what it is now, I loved, Dick, a sweet girl, the flashes of whose dark eyes haunt me still. You know how cold my temperament is; but then it was the volcano's fire—a covert hell; it was not love, it was idolatry, passion, raving madness. I had money; she was poor. I threw gifts at her feet, poured flattery in her ear, worshipped her with the eloquence of love; but all in vain—a rose from the hand of another was more valued than my gifts, a smile from his more dear than all the passionate breathings of my broken heart."

"This from you, Faddle!" exclaimed his friend in surprise.

"Ay, it astonishes you, no doubt," replied his companion, dashing aside a tear; "but if Satan, as they tell us, was an angel, why doubt that I was human? Dick, I had once a strange temptation. I was sick of life, of my heart's struggles and its hopelessness. Like a fool, I had resolved to die—as if even death could destroy a fire like that which was consuming me. I entered the little parlour in her mother's cottage, and found her sleeping on the sofa. The balmy breath gently parted her deep ruby lips, and the long clustering curls, dressed by Nature's hand, fell in careless grace over her neck and brow. Her eyes were closed, but I could see their lustre through the tender lids. Mad at the sight of her beauty, at the thought that

another—a clod, a thing without a mind or heart—should possess her, I drew from my pocket the phial containing the poison. It was prussic acid. One drop and all would have been over; but at that instant she unclosed her eyes, and I was disarmed. To save my soul from hell, Dick, I could not have harmed a hair of her dear head. I left her—left her to be another's."

"Poor Frank!" said Wilmott, a sentiment of former kindness recurring; "who would have guessed this; you—the gayest of the gay—the libertine—the sceptic—you to have been caught thus!"

"I have never been caught since; but I am a fool to have suffered old recollections to touch me even for a moment; although they are seldom absent from me, I do not often prate about them. When I have felt the kiss of beauty on my lip, my heart has whispered 'This is not'— but I dare not breathe her name, it would be profanation now. Let us change the subject. I have taken the room."

"What room?" demanded Wilmott, turning deadly pale.

"Why, for the execution, to be sure. Ordered breakfast at ten, and sent champagne and cigars. You will accompany me?"

"Not for worlds," whispered the horror-stricken accomplice of his crime.

"You must; half the sporting men about town will be there; our absence would be remarked. Besides, the horror of the reality may cure the baby terrors of your imagination."

"No; sleeping or waking they haunt me ever! I see him first in the pride of health, then struggling in our murderous grasp! His warm blood is ever on my hand! I feel it trickling over me even as I speak!"

"Fool," said Faddle; "it has been washed from it long since."

"From my hand it may be, but not my soul!"

"Leave your soul to look after the affairs of the firm, and suffer your conscience to be the sleeping partner. Why, man, at times I have a touch of what you call remorse, as well as you; but not in this case. Both Hawk and the young stranger were robbers."

"Granted."

"They plundered us."

"True."

"And we punished them instead of the law. Come no more of this whining; but come and take a drive with me: it will cheer your blood, which seems to run through your veins this morning with about the same celerity as the life-stream circulates in a tortoise."

Wilmott, whose greatest horror was being left alone to his own reflection, consented, and in a few minutes the drag rattled away from the door. Few that noticed them as they passed through the West-end, crowded with brilliant equipages and happy faces, would have imagined how much misery and crime that dashing turn-out conveyed.

No sooner were they gone than Rose, who had overheard their discourse, tottered from her place of concealment. Her cheek was pale, and her eyes dilated with horror. She had heard sufficient to convince her that the father of her child was a murderer, a being who might be called to expiate his crim upon a scaffold, bequeathing to her and her boy the heritage of infamy. Scarcely knowing how, she contrived to reach her chamber, and snatching her infant from its cot, pressed it to her maternal breast, shedding over it bitter tears. They relieved her heart.

The morning of the execution at last arrived, and London poured forth its thousands to witness the brutal spectacle. The streets in the neighbourhood of Newgate seemed to have been flooded with a long stream. To those who looked down from the tops of the houses, or the windows—which, like boxes at the opera on a gala night, command an extra price when morbid curiosity is roused by the peculiar crime of the being about to die—each street seemed paved with heads. Mechanics neglecting their morning work; apprentices and boys now had crept from their homes without permission; the pickpocket, pugilist, gambler; the ruffian of every grade was there, with upstaring faces fixed upon the rude cross-beam, upon which society was about to wrest from God his high prerogative, and deprive a fellow creature of life. As Hawk had been well known in the sporting world, the windows in the immediate vicinity of the gallows were well let. The police were from an early hour in the morning making way for parties to their respective *boxes*, much in the same way as the attendants do at a theatre. Most of these favoured personages were armed with a ticket, signed by one of the commissioners of police, with the simple direction to pass on the bearer; a half-crown or two did the rest.

"That cove, in my 'pinion, had better ha' stayed in bed," observed a costermonger, as Wilmott, more dead than alive, made his way, leaning upon Faddle's arm, to the room engaged for them. A policeman, to whom they had shown one of the magical cards, preceded them.

"Silence, fellow," said the officer, pushing him aside.

"I shan't; the play ain't begun yet; I have as good a right to a place in the pit as you have."

A loud laugh from those around applauded this sally of the costermonger, who, encouraged by their approbation, indulged his propensity to talk about what he called the rights of things, for he was an orator in his own neighbourhood.

"That's it. Why can't the rich keep to their own amusements, and leave us ours? We never interferes or crowds them at the operor; why should they hustle us here? This is our operer—the people's play—and devilish good acting there is too; that Calcraft is a capital performer."

"He certainly does take a *first line* of business," observed Mr. Scraper, one of the small fry of the press, a thing who lived by raking up the garbage of humanity, and serving its most putrid morsels to the diseased appetite of the public. He could not resist the occasion for making what he was pleased to designate a pun—and he found fools to laugh at it. He had his twenty accounts of the execution all ready—written, of course, over night—in his pocket. The moment the drop should fall, he was, as usual, prepared to start, leaving one at every office. It was sure to be received at two or three. An execution was a godsend to Mr. Scraper, who could always obtain credit at the coffee-shop upon the strength of one, a week, at least, in advance.

The room which Faddle had engaged belonged to a widow, who kept a shop directly opposite the place of execution, and as her business was barely sufficient to support her and her family of lazy grown-up sons, who were supposed to manage her affairs, but who daily robbed her, an execution of any peculiar interest was as important to her as to Mr. Scraper—it frequently enabled her to pay her rent. The two first-floor windows she reckoned ten guineas. She

had once made fifteen, *but that was a remarkable affair*. Second-floor six, and the heads of the house, which would accommodate about fifty comfortably, as she remarked, five shillings each. She had so long been accustomed to make a market of her house on these occasions, that all idea of the nature of the spectacle, its horror and solemnity, were quite lost upon her. The more atrocious the criminal, the greater the star. Tickets were at a premium. The old lady was remarkably neat in her person, and, strange to say, had a marked expression of benevolence in her countenance.

"Walk in, gentlemen," she exclaimed, dropping the chain after she had reconnoitred Faddle and Wilmott through the half-open door. "A sweet morning for the execution. How very fortunate! Would you like any breakfast? I have excellent coffee—all ready."

"No," said Faddle, rather sharply, for he was anxious to get Wilmott out of her sight, for fear in his terror he should let fall something awkward.

"Perhaps when it's all over then; the rolls will be ready by that time. Straight on, gentlemen; you know your way. I can't leave the door; there's no trusting any one on an occasion like this."

As they mounted the gloomy staircase, they heard her say "five shillings" in answer to an application made by a respectable mechanic for a seat on the roof of the house. "I never take less, young man." The price of the *ticket* was given, for they heard his step upon the stairs mounting after them.

Faddle's first care on entering the room was to lock the door, in order to keep out all intruders; his next to place a chair as far from it as possible, in order that no imprudent word or exclamation of remorse might reach the ear of any listener; not that there were likely to be such—all were too much interested in the spectacle about to pass before their eyes.

"Why have you brought me here?" faintly demanded the repentant man.

"To string your nerves and cure you of your folly. I never yet knew a danger, physical or mental, that was not lessened by being confronted boldly. Had you only heard of Hawk's execution, it would have haunted you for ever; seeing it, you may forget it."

"Impossible."

"How is it, then," demanded Faddle, "that you think more of him than of the man we murdered? Can your philosophy explain that?"

"Because it is not yet too late to save him. Had the struggle been life for life, I should not so much have minded it—for he had robbed me; but to see him led like a beast to the shamblee, and know that he is innocent, that he is suffering for my crime, is too horrible. Can the murderer know peace?"

"Oh dear, yes. There is a fellow—move your chair nearer to the window—who has, in his time, taken a hundred lives; and yet I dare bet a fifty that he sleeps as well after each fresh murder as though he had said his prayers only and performed some good action."

"What mean you?" demanded Wilmott, whose eyes were fixed upon the crowd beneath.

"There, look upon the gallows!"

"The executioner!" said his companion, averting his eyes in disgust, as he saw the fellow busy in making some preliminary arrangement.

"And what is he but a murderer? Are you such a fool as to think that, because twelve men pronounce a thing correct, that it is so; or that the wig and ermine robes of the judge give him a privilege above humanity that he should destroy it? Humbug!"

At this moment there was a silence in the street; the murmur of the voices beneath them had ceased, like the subsiding waves of the sea, when the breath of the tempest has ceased to agitate them. Wilmott felt that the victim was upon the scaffold. He dared not look.

"Try a cigar," said his companion.

"No, no!" gasped the unhappy man, starting from his chair; "let me go! let me go!"

"Where? to take his place?"

"God help me—God help me!" said Wilmott, and resumed his seat.

"How devilish pale he looks!" coolly continued Faddle, at the same time eyeing Hawk through his glass as he appeared upon the scaffold; "the fellow has no more pluck than a pigeon."

While Calcraft was adjusting the rope round the neck of the unhappy man, the only indication of excitement on the part of his quondam friend was the increased vehemence with which he puffed his cigar; but whether it rose from pleasure or remorse, gratified vengeance or a mere human feeling, he was such an odd compound it was impossible to guess.

"There" he said, turning to his friend, "the fellow's face is turned towards you; look upon him now. That white cap is the curtain which ends the drama of his existence. And now, the executioner retires."

Stung, maddened by terror, Wilmott rushed to the window and gazed upon the spectacle with starting eyes. His companion had said truly, when he observed that the horror of the reality was inferior to the horror of his imagination; for when the drop fell and the lifting of the shoulders and the heaving of the chest were over, the wretched man felt as if a weight had been removed from his heart. Half fainting and sick, he staggered into the centre of the room, and fell into a chair.

"All right!" said Faddle. "We are safe now."

He dreamt not, in the triumph of his fancied security, that the slow foot of Time and the hand of Justice would one day terribly avenge the death of his victim; who, whatever his crimes, was at least innocent of the one for which he died. In about ten minutes there was a gentle tap at the door, and the old woman whispered:

"Coffee is quite ready."

"Damn your coffee!" muttered the heartless ruffian to himself; then aloud—"Presently, my good woman, presently."

"Any rolls?"

"Yes—any thing—what you will."

Her steps were heard receding from the door, and Faddle immediately occupied himself with recovering his companion. Taking a flask of brandy from his pocket, he applied a portion of its contents to his forehead, and poured a few drops down his throat. Wilmott stared for some moments wildly round the room on recovering his recollection, and bursting at last into a flood of tears, demanded of his friend what had passed.

"Is it reality or a dream?" He had lately been haunted by such.

"A reality; and a fortunate one for us."

"Fortunate!"

"Ay—it brings security. Come, be a man. There, pour a little more courage into that craven heart of thine, and meet the world with a bold gay face. We may sleep in peace, calmly, now."

"Never—not even in the grave."

Faddle smiled, and lit another cigar.

Strengthened by a second draught of the brandy, Wilmott, as soon as the body was removed, was conducted by his friend from the house to a cab, which a policeman with some difficulty procured for them. As they descended, the little old widow was at the bottom of the stairs, with her smiling quiet face. She had reaped an unusual harvest; her rent for the quarter, which was due, was in her pocket—her mind was at ease—she thought not of the scene which had passed—she had now no care.

As they drove through the laughing mob, who, with their usual levity, were discussing the execution, they recognised many of their sporting friends, who, like themselves, had been to witness the last struggles of poor Hawk, and bows and nods were exchanged.

"Where did you hide yourselves?" demanded one.

"A window to ourselves," replied Faddle.

"Ah! a private box!"

"Were you with Lorton's party?" demanded another.

A brief "No" was the response; and at last they reached Faddle's lodgings in safety. Here Wilmott remained all day, listening moodily to the reasonings of his friend, who was no less surprised than delighted at the firmness which his dupe had attained. Towards evening he returned to his home, too much agitated still to observe the shudder of disgust with which the unhappy Rose received him. No sooner had he left than Dick entered the room.

"Where have you been?" demanded his master, who saw that he was as pale as death.

"At the execution?"

"I did not see you."

"I was in the crowd directly under your window, sir," replied the poor fellow. "I observed Mr. Wilmott; he looked a great deal more like a murderer than poor Hawk."

"He has a chicken heart."

"And you one of iron."

"What mean you?"

"Nothing, sir, nothing; only, as I have done all you wished, I hope you will perform your promise to me, and give up the forgery."

Without a word, Faddle went to a cabinet, which he unlocked, and drew from it a paper; placing it in the hand of his servant, he quietly pointed to the fire. Dick understood him. In an instant it was consumed.

The artful man had counted on his haste and agitation —not without reason. Dick was too useful a fellow to be easily parted with. The paper he had given him was not the real one.

"I am safe now, then?"

"Quite," said his master.

"Good bye, then, sir; yours is too dangerous a service for me. I shall seek my bread in another land. The recollection of this day's work will haunt me while I live. God forgive us both!"

No sooner had Dick taken his leave than his master proceeded to make his toilette to receive the unhappy deluded Lady Wilton, whose visits were now daily. Such was the mastery he obtained over her, that he induced her to draw repeatedly large sums for his use, which were either dissipated at the gaming-table, or wasted in speculations as disastrous. Every week the account at her banker's became so rapidly diminished, that the worthy dealer in money became alarmed. He could not make it out. But being a man of the world, his suspicions became excited, and he determined, before communicating with her husband, if possible, to discover the secret of her conduct. For this purpose he resolved to employ an old confidential clerk, upon whose fidelity and prudence he could equally rely. By his directions Mr. Minim, the name of the "father of the bank," as he was called by the juniors, was sent for into his private room.

"Minim," said the banker, "my mind is uneasy."

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope," replied the old man. "Datchet's securities have been taken up; Masterman's account is paid. 'Tis true Oxley and Co. are a little shaken; but the risk is not very considerable. The house is only in for four thousand."

The speaker paused, and fixed his keen grey eyes upon his employer, as if to ask what else there could be which could possibly give him the least uneasiness.

"It is not that," said his principal, smiling. "We should be able to stand a tougher blow than even their failure would give us. It is this affair of Lady Wilton's."

"Well, that is mysterious; twenty thousand pounds drawn out in three months."

"Many of the notes have been returned through Bilk and Company, the railroad brokers, and yet I cannot hear that her ladyship holds scrip on a single line. I could understand that."

"Gambling," said the clerk.

"I have inquired amongst those most likely to be informed, and can't make out that her ladyship ever plays. There is some mystery in this. Did she not come and sign the cheques herself, I should be inclined to think that they were forgeries. That, of course, is impossible."

"And when she does come, it is at such an early hour," added the clerk, "and generally on foot. The last time she signed, her hand trembled so she could scarcely hold the pen, and I saw that her eyes were red with weeping. I am sure I don't know what she can have to weep for, with thirty thousand pounds still on the credit side of her account."

The banker smiled at the old man's mode of reasoning; but he, from mingling more frequently in the world, knew that women possessed such things as hearts—a discovery his subordinate had never made. His only idea of a heart was that it was a sort of forcing pump, which set the current of life in motion. All his love, feelings, and interest were centred in the operation of the money market and calculating discounts. Gold was his idol, and he bowed before it like an idolator. There was room for no other divinity within the shrine, and even if there had been, he would not have known which to place there.

"I have a strange office for you to fulfil," said his employer, "but one which, from your age and character, you will not be suspected in. You must follow the lady the next time she leaves the bank."

"Follow her?" repeated the astonished Minim.

"If you dodge her to a house, inquire who lives there. Do this discreetly; for the credit of the firm, if any thing should suddenly occur, is at stake, and bring me word back."

"But who can take my stool at the desk?" demanded the clerk, to whom his daily avocation appeared of far greater importance than the following of a lady, although she happened to be a peeress, and had a balance of thirty thousand pounds in their hands.

"We can spare you for a few hours."

"But the books? Something may go wrong."

"You can look over them on your return," said the banker, smiling. "It must be a curious error that could escape your vigilance. You understand my wish, and will, I doubt not, comply with it. Besides, I can remain below during your absence. I think you may trust me to replace you."

Although not quite assured that he could do so, the worthy man was too polite to express his opinion or make further remonstrance. It was the first time in his life he had ever gone out of the daily routine of his business, and nothing less than the command of his principal, a thing he never disputed, could have induced him to consent to do so. Two days afterwards, as soon as Lady Wilton made her appearance, he quietly withdrew to the inner office, and left the banking house by the private door, secretly cursing, as he did so, the caprices of women, which could thus derange his usual habits and occupation. Tying a large comforter round his face, so as to hide his chin and mouth, and placing a pair of green spectacles upon his nose, which had been provided for the occasion, he quietly waited outside the door till the lady should make her appearance. It was not long before she did so. On leaving the banking house, which was close to Temple Bar, the unhappy woman directed her steps towards the Strand, and on reaching Somerset House, to Minim's great astonishment, called for a cab, which she entered, and drove off towards the Haymarket.

"Cab!" muttered the clerk to himself, as he got in another, and directed the driver to keep the first one in view. "A peeress in a cab! I begin to think with my principal, that there is some strange mystery in all this. What can it be? She looks like a runaway bankrupt."

The two cabs drove rapidly along. On reaching the end of the colonnade of the Opera House, the first one stopped. Lady Wilton alighted, thickly veiled, and placing a sovereign in the driver's hand, walked rapidly away, without waiting for change. The fellow, who thought she had mistaken the coin for a shilling, was too pleased with his morning's work to remind her of the mistake, but made the best of his way to another stand. Mr. Minim made no such error, but paid his fare with two fourpenny pieces. He collected them for such occasions.

As soon as her ladyship entered the lodging of her paramour, the clerk marked the house by carefully copying the number in his memorandum book, in his usual methodical style.

"I know the number of the house," thought the old man to himself; "now to ascertain who lives in

it; it has more the appearance of chambers than a private residence."

Turning round, he saw a policeman; a fellow with that sharp, cunning look which generally accompanies those whose peculiar office it is to inspect and watch the conduct of their fellow-creatures.

"Can you tell me who lives in 63?" demanded Minim, pointing at the same time to the door.

"A right jolly fellow," said the man; "Captain Faddle."

"Faddle!" repeated the clerk; "don't know him—his name is not worth twopence on 'Change, and yet I have seen it somewhere. Ah!" he added, "I know now; it begins to grow clear."

He suddenly recollected that he had seen it on one of the notes which he had paid to Lady Wilton, and which he had received in the course of business from Bilk and Company.

"Have you ever seen the lady, who just entered, visit here before?"

"Three or four times a week," said the man eagerly—for he began to suspect there was a case getting up, out of which money was to be made. "Who is she?"

The clerk was too cautious to answer that question.

"She is his mistress," continued the speaker.

A new and unexpected light suddenly broke upon the inquirer's mind, and internally he blessed his own state of celibacy, which guarded him from the danger of such a fate as he felt convinced Lord Wilton had met with.

Although he had through life regarded women as necessary persons to cook, wash, and make his home comfortable, he had never experienced a symptom of the tender passion. His mistress was the great ledger of the bank, and he found more happiness in its well ruled pages than in any pleasure which love could have afforded him.

"Tell me, who is she?" demanded the policeman; "some lady from the Opera? she does not look like a common woman—one of your highfliers."

"No."

"Is she married?"

"Ask her."

"You are devilish close!"

"There's half-a-crown for your information," replied Minim, slipping the coin into his hand, and hurrying away, impatient to report progress to his employer. "God bless me, here's a work! here's a blot in the day-book of poor Lord Wilton!"

These last words were muttered to himself as he passed along the Strand, pondering in his mind on the consequences of his discovery. He arrived at the bank heated and breathless; he had walked so fast, for he was too economical of his master's money to take a second cab.

When he entered the house and took his seat at his desk—for the books were his first thought—a smile at his grotesque appearance was visible on the countenances of the junior clerks as they remarked the ludicrous figure of their ancient comrade; but he, entirely absorbed in the information he had obtained, thought not of the green spectacles upon his nose or the comforter round his neck.

After a hasty glance at his beloved books, he made the best of his way to the room of his principal.

"Well," said the banker, rubbing his hands, "have you found it out?"

"I have."

"And where did the lady go to?"

"And who lives there?"

"Captain Faddle. I have seen his name on the back of the notes which we paid her, and which were returned to the bank through the house of Bilk and Company. A sad affair, sir, a sad affair! This comes of trusting women with the uncontrolled use of money. How should they know what to do with it? The policeman tells me she is in the habit of visiting him three or four times a week."

A smile of mutual intelligence passed between the speakers. There was no necessity to speak their thoughts; their looks conveyed them plainly enough. Mr. Shortsight, the name of the head of the firm, felt that it was necessary for the credit of his house to see Lord Wilton; besides, as a married man, he felt a husband's sympathies for his misfortunes. Dismissing his subordinate to his desk, he waited impatiently till the hour of closing, and then ordered his carriage to pay the important visit.

Lord Wilton was in his library when the banker arrived; his thoughts at the moment were occupied upon the subject of his wife's strange and abstracted manner: all her usual pursuits and pleasures for months past had been abandoned; her air was distraught, and on more than one occasion he had surprised her weeping. Although any thing but a jealous husband, all this gave him food for reflection. The idea of criminality never once entered his imagination, but he could not avoid remembering that there was at least thirty years' difference in their ages, and thirty years make a vast difference where the affections are concerned. He was somewhat surprised when Mr. Shortsight, the banker, was announced. The good man apologised for the intrusion, as he was pleased to term it, as soon as he had taken the seat to which the earl politely pointed. He felt that his task was a delicate one, and he almost wished that he had not undertaken it.

"Fine weather, my lord."

The peer elevated his eyebrows slightly, and answered in the affirmative. Of course he did not imagine that his visitor had called upon him merely to discourse on the state of the weather.

"Her ladyship, I trust, is well?"

"Quite well."

"And all the family?"

"All," said his lordship, more and more puzzled. "May I ask the purport of your visit?"

This was a question there was no avoiding. The banker hemmed and hawed, and began a long preamble about his high respect for his lordship's family, and her ladyship's family, who had so long kept an account at his house.

"And which account I have no doubt has been very correctly kept. But really you must excuse me," added the peer, glancing at a timepiece on the marble console. "I have a motion to bring forward in the house to-night. May I again demand the nature of your business? for it is a visit of business, I presume."

Thus pushed, Mr. Shortsight screwed up his courage to the sticking place.

"You are aware, my lord, that her ladyship had a large sum—fifty thousand pounds—at her personal disposal, left by her late father, vested in our house?"

"Had a large sum? Has, I presume you mean?"

"I seldom," replied the man of business, "make an error in speaking on money matters. Nearly half of it has been drawn out."

The master of the house was astounded; his wife's

the idea immediately struck him that a forgery had been committed. He said as much.

"No forgery," interrupted the banker. "We are too careful for that. The money has been paid to her ladyship, personally, at various times, extending over a period of four months."

"What can she have wanted with it?" exclaimed the peer, the real cause never for a moment crossing his imagination. "I fear she has been duped."

"I fear so too," said his visitor, drily. "This occurrence, so unusual, naturally excited my suspicions, and I ventured to—to—"

"Suspicions!" repeated his lordship, interrupting him. "Suspicions of Lady Wilton! Ridiculous!"

"Hear me out, my lord, before you judge. I ventured to direct one of my clerks to follow her ladyship, and he traced her to a house—No. 63, Haymarket. Have you any friends or relatives residing there?"

"None," replied the husband, for the first time turning pale; "not a creature. Do you know who resides there?"

The agonised expression of countenance with which this question was asked proved that the speaker's suspicions were at last aroused.

"Captain Faddle," was the reply.

The earl bounded from his seat as though a serpent had stung him. He had twice seen the gentleman—whose reputation was well known to him—bow to his wife, once at the opera, and once in the park. He had quietly observed to her that he was not an acquaintance fit for her, and recommended her to discontinue it, but without the slightest suspicion that it would ever become dangerous either to her peace or his honour.

"Captain Faddle!" he mechanically repeated.

"Several of the notes paid to her ladyship have been returned with his signature on the back, through the house of Bilk and Company, the stockbrokers."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, my lord. We never pay a note to a large amount away without taking the number."

The unhappy husband paced the room for several minutes in silent agitation. He dared not trust himself to give expression to his thoughts; the agony of them nearly choked him.

"Thank you, Mr. Shortsight," he at last faltered out,—"thank you; this attention to the interest of my family demands my gratitude. I understand it all. Lady Wilton, dazzled by the bubble schemes of the day, has been induced to speculate; that is all—it can be nothing more."

"I hope not."

"I am sure not!" said the earl sternly. "Good evening. I will speak with her ladyship upon the subject. Good evening!" he added hastily; for, in the agony of his heart, he longed to be alone.

The worthy banker, who almost regretted the step he had taken, bowed and withdrew.

No sooner was Lord Wilton left alone, than he gave way to the rage which consumed him.

"Dishonoured!" he whispered, as if fearful to let the echo of the word be heard; "dishonoured in my grey hairs and in my children! God! how I have idolised her! And this my recompense! The finger of scorn will point at me—my name become the jest of every club—the pity of my friends! No, no," he added, "I shall not live to hear that; I have one refuge left me still!"

At this moment the groom of the chamber announced that the carriage was waiting.

"Send it away," said his master; "I shall not go down to the house this evening."

The astonished servant was about to withdraw, wondering at such an unusual order—for his lordship was most constant in his attendance—when he was recalled.

"Is Lady Wilton at home?"

"Yes—that is, I believe so, my lord. I saw her ladyship's own footman just now in the hall."

"Send him to me."

The menial bowed and withdrew. In a few moments his fellow-servant entered the library. He was a young man, the son of a tenant in the country, who had been first page, then footman, in the family. The earl knew that he was honest, and had a high opinion of his integrity.

"John," said his master, "I am about to ask you a question respecting your lady. Answer me with your usual truthfulness and candour. You know the reliance I place upon you."

John coloured deeply. He had too long been upon town, as the phrase is, not to have formed strange surmises from the extraordinary proceedings of his lady. He guessed what was to follow.

"Have you accompanied your mistress to the banker's lately?"

"Frequently, my lord."

"At what hours?"

"As early as eleven; but then I went with the carriage; at a later hour on foot."

"Did you accompany her further?"

The man hesitated.

"Speak out."

"As far as the Opera House, my lord, where my lady invariably dismissed me, saying she would join the children in the park, or call at her milliner's.

"Did you ever watch to see which way she went? I mean," he added, fearing to betray his feelings, "did you ever observe?"

"Generally up the Haymarket, my lord."

A sudden pang shot through the heart of the peer at the reply; it confirmed all that he feared—all that the banker had told him. He was too much agitated to speak. With a wave of the hand he dismissed him, well knowing he could rely on his discretion. No sooner was he alone than he sat down and wrote a letter to his wife's brother, who was a colonel in the army, and of the same club as himself. The burning tears of wounded pride and outraged affection fell upon the paper as he wrote. The letter once dispatched, he again ordered his carriage and drove to the house; he felt that he had want of occupation—something to fill his mind and prevent it from dwelling on a subject which was fraught with madness, misery, and shame. The unhappy man did not seek his home—his once happy home—till an early hour in the morning, when he knew his faithless wife had retired to rest. At an early hour he rose from his fevered couch and paced his chamber, much to the astonishment of his valet, who found him ready dressed about eleven. He saw his wife leave the house with her children and their governess, as if for their morning walk. In five minutes after he followed them to the inclosure in St. James's Park. The infants and their attendants were alone. With frantic haste he threw himself into a cab and drove to the club, where his brother in-law was waiting for him, and drove to the Haymarket. On their way he re-

counted to his horror-stricken companion the tale of his shame and misery. The brothers-in-law both planted themselves near the door of Faddle's lodgings. For more than an hour they stood sentry upon their posts. At last they heard the sound of feet in the passage, and the husband's heart was agonised by the echo of a kiss. An instant longer and he would have gone mad. The door was opened at last, and the guilty Lady Wilton stood face to face with the man she had so cruelly injured and dishonoured—with the father of her children, and her incensed brother. The latter, darting through the half-closed door, proceeded to inflict chastisement upon the seducer—so severe, that but for the interference of the police, who were attracted to the spot by his cries, his career of infamy and vice in this world would have been over. Lady Wilton had fainted. When she recovered she found herself in a chaise, with her brother driving towards Essex, to the family seat, the home of her youth and innocence, but which she had dishonoured. As she gazed upon the sad stern countenance of her companion, the sense of her degradation fell bitterly upon her heart. It was but a few hours before he had encountered her at a brilliant party, in that circle from which she felt she was now banished for ever, and greeted her with a brother's kiss of pride and love. As the carriage rolled on, the thought of her children whom she so tenderly loved, the husband she had dishonoured, presented themselves. Falling at her brother's feet, she sobbed bitterly:

"Take me back! For pity's sake, take me back!"

"Where?" coldly demanded the colonel.

"To my lord and children."

"The adulteress," he sternly replied, "has neither husband nor children. A few days will deprive her even of her name. You should have thought of them before."

"But to ask their forgiveness, and die!"

"You must die without either seeing or obtaining their pardon," he replied. "Yours is a crime which Heaven may forgive, but man never. Lydia," he added, bitterly, "how have you fallen! You have descended from a sphere of which you were the ornament—degraded yourself with a cur, a coward, a wretch without honour or courage—a knave, who has plundered, as well as degraded you—a felon in heart, if not in fact."

Heedless of her prayers, tears, and frantic supplications, the firm soldier proceeded with his charge till they reached the family mansion, from which she had parted an honoured bride, if not a happy one. And now, to contemplate the change was more than her reason could support. The following morning found her a raving maniac, calling upon the children she had abandoned, the husband she had dishonoured. After placing her under the charge of servants, upon whose fidelity and kindness he knew he could rely, her brother returned to London to his disconsolate friend, Lord Wilton. The affair, from being whispered, soon became openly talked about, and in a few days proceedings were commenced in the Ecclesiastical Court for a divorce.

It was some days before Faddle had recovered sufficiently from the thrashing he had received to leave town, which he did to avoid the ridicule the disgrace had brought upon him. He had vainly tried, amongst all his acquaintances, to find one who would degrade himself by being the bearer of a challenge to his punisher. Many laughed at the request, others damned his impertinence, and one, more sarcastic than the rest, advised him to send it by his groom. As a last resource, he called upon Wilmott, whom he had not seen for some days, thinking that he dared not refuse him. To his surprise, he found the bird had flown—he and his wife had started for the continent. At first he knew not whether to rejoice or regret his escape from his influence; the former feeling ultimately prevailed, for he dreaded that he would become a dependant upon his bounty; but he had rather have heard that he was dead—much rather.

In order to provide for his journey, he paid a visit to the brokers, Messrs. Bilk and Company; and, without observing the cool indifference with which he was received by the head of the firm, demanded three hundred pounds.

"From what assets?" said the man of business, with a grin.

"From the sum of eighteen thousand pounds, deposited in your hands," replied Faddle, with a smile, deeming that the man of business was bandying jests with him.

Mr. Bilk, with the same unmoved expression of countenance, opened his desk, and, instead of the sum he asked, handed a paper to him. It was an injunction from the Court of Chancery, laying a distringus upon any money or moneys he might have in his hands pertaining to Frank Faddle, commonly known by the name of Captain Faddle; the said moneys having been obtained by fraud and misrepresentation from Lady Wilton, without any value being given; the said Lady Wilton not being at the time competent to manage her own affairs, but labouring under certain delusions respecting him.

The villain was thunderstruck; the harvest he had gleaned from her weakness by the vilest arts, was in an instant torn from him by a power against which all his cunning and tact were useless. Like a madman he rushed from the counting-house, breathing curses too fearful for repetition. He was once more a ruined man, overwhelmed with debts—a dishonoured beggar. What to do he knew not. Life was to be commenced again, with a blasted character and sullied name. His dupes were partially avenged.

"Curse them!" he muttered, as soon as he reached the open air; "they have struck me down at last. Fool that I was to trust the spoil to any hand! I ought to have known that they would use every means to crush me. I have lost the game with the trump cards in my hand."

On his return home he found, to add to his embarrassments, a notice of civil action from the earl to recover damages for an adulterous intercourse with his wife. Turn which way he would, ruin was before him.

"Ronse, Frank!" he muttered; "this is the moment for action, not regret; I shall have time for that hereafter."

Hastily looking over his jewellery and pocket-book, he found that by the sale of the former, and the contents of the latter, he might perhaps be enabled to reach the continent with three hundred pounds. His arrangements were quickly made, his passport procured, and all prepared to start the following morning for France, there to commence a new life of adventure and crime.

To prevent suspicion as to his intentions, he resolved to appear, for the last time, at the opera. He felt a ferocious joy in making himself the observed of observers in braving public opinion, and about nine he made his appearance in his stall. All eyes were bent on him. Those who were seated near him—men of intrigue, the turf, and fashion—turned from him with

loathing and contempt; they could have forgiven him the seduction, but despised him for the plunder. To add to his mortification, Nancy was in the house with Sir Henry Stringer, whose attachment augmented towards her every day. During the time she had been under his protection, masters of eminence had been engaged to cultivate her natural talents; the baronet marked their development with intense pleasure, and often caught himself sighing when he thought that the errors into which she had been betrayed rendered it impossible he should marry her.

For the first time she wore that evening a magnificent diamond necklace which her lover had presented her. Faddle observed it, and his eyes sparkled with jealousy and rage; for, as far as his nature permitted him, his mercenary heart had been attached to Nancy.

On leaving the theatre he stood behind one of the columns to watch her into her carriage.

"You will be with me in the morning, then?" he heard her say to her companion, as he bade her farewell, business concerning a friend having detained him.

"As soon as possible," replied the baronet; "but you need not be under the least alarm."

"Oh, it is not that. Though the room in which I sleep is so far removed from the servants, and the entrance so close to the ground, I have no fear of robbers. It is your society I want."

A kiss followed, which sent a pang through Faddle's heart, and the carriage drove off.

An idea suddenly struck him. The diamonds upon her neck were, at the least, worth a thousand pounds. What was to prevent him from becoming possessed of them? Her own words indicated the means; her window was low, and the servants slept at a distance. His mind was made up, and he hastily returned home. Searching Dick's apartment, he found an old jacket, which his late servant had used for working in, and left either from haste or not deeming it worth the trouble of removing. Disguising himself as well as he could with it, he cautiously left the house, and after walking a considerable distance, took a cab, and drove towards the villa. He was perfectly acquainted with the grounds and plan of the house, having repeatedly dined there while on terms of intimacy with the baronet. One light alone was visible from the house; he well knew that it gleamed from Nancy's window.

Morning was just beginning to dawn before he ventured to commence operations. By means of the gardener's ladder, which he found in the tool-house, he cautiously reached the window, and peering in, saw that the woman, whose head had often been pillowed upon his shoulder, was asleep; one arm thrown carelessly upon the coverlid, the other crossed upon her breast. With his diamond ring he carefully removed a pane of glass, and opening the window, which was a French one, stepped into the chamber. His first care was to secure the jewels, which he found in the case. Thrusting them into his pocket, he turned towards the couch with a ferocious joy, and gazed upon the sleeper, now completely in his power. Once more he was resolved to possess her person; by her own consent, if possible—if not, by proceeding to the last extremity which brutal passion and violence can urge. Placing his hand in a position so as to be ready to stop her cries, he gently woke her. Nancy, started from a pleasing dream, was horror-stricken when she beheld a man by the side of her bed. She would have cried out, but his hand was in an instant pressed upon her mouth.

"Silence!" he said. "I don't want to harm you, but I must speak with you before I leave England for ever. Promise to be calm, and I'll remove my hand."

The promise was conveyed by a look. The ruffian kept his word.

"You loved me once, Nancy."

"I did," sobbed the unhappy girl, who immediately recognised him, "till you cast me off, insulted every woman's feeling in my heart, crushed, and trampled on me. Do you wonder that love was destroyed in the wreck?"

"And yet I loved you," said the villain, "madly, truly, better than I ever loved any being, save one, in the world. You are incredulous?"

"Men do not sell the thing they love, or drive it hastily from them."

"And yet I love you. Come, Nancy," he said, "one last kiss—one last embrace. I could not quit you without seeing you once more before I leave England a ruined man, to seek for fortune in a strange land."

"Never!" shrieked the girl, half springing from the bed. "I will not be a second time degraded."

"There is no degradation in love."

"Love! say rather passion. My heart was recovering from its shock—its sufferings; why cloud my youthful days again? Hear me, Faddle: I have money—jewels; take them—I'll give them freely—but as you are a man, abuse not my weakness—crush me not in your passion. Be generous."

"Ay," said the ruffian, "as generous as the world has been to me. I have sworn once more to possess you, and I'll keep my word; by your own consent, if possible—if not, by force."

"Never!"

"We shall see."

He sprang upon the bed, and desperate was the struggle which ensued before the villain could accomplish his detestable triumph over woman's weakness and resistance. He did, however, accomplish it. When he removed the pillow which he had held over her mouth to stifle her cries, Nancy was a corse. Then fell that vague terror upon his heart which haunts the murderer. In every breath he heard a step. He fled from the house, cursed and abandoned, like Cain. The image of the woman he had so cruelly deserted and betrayed was ever before him. Her eyes haunted him; he saw them in the air, fixed in reproach upon him. In every thing he encountered he recognised the features of his victim. The canker of remorse—the worm which never dies—was in his heart; its fire on his brain. Without returning to his lodgings to change his dress, or make the least preparation for his departure, he wandered all the day in the low neighbourhood of Wapping, waiting for the means of an escape to France.

It would require an eloquent pen to describe the agony of Sir Henry when, on entering the chamber of his mistress at a late hour, full of the ardour of love, and its impatience to clasp the object of it, he found her a corse. The couch, as well as her person, bore evidence of the nature of the outrage she had been subjected to. The unhappy baronet tore his hair, and raved like a madman. The police were sent for—rewards offered—servants questioned—no clue was to be obtained. Faddle was unsuspected. The cabman who had driven him came forward voluntarily, and described the person who had engaged him. It was so unlike the elegant libertine, that all attributed the deed to some common housebreaker; none suspected private vengeance—at least *none but one.*

For some time Sir Henry was obliged to be kept under restraint by his watchful friends, but it was long ere he recovered from the blow which had fallen upon his heart. When he did so, accompanied by a devoted friend, he retired to the continent.

If sympathy could have consoled poor Lord Wilton for the outrage he had received, he might have been a happy man; but that was impossible. Life was poisoned at its very fount—domestic confidence and honour. Cold as he was to all appearance in his outward demeanour, he possessed a warm heart—one around which the ties of love were so closely wound, that it became impossible to separate them. The sight even of his children became hateful to him. There was poison in their kisses, doubt in every feature. From the firmness with which he bore up outwardly against the shock, little suspicion was entertained of the real state of his heart. He was unwatched, because unsuspected.

It was night, and the unhappy man was seated in his study. He had that very day executed a will, bequeathing his children to the guardianship of the colonel, whose friendship and honour he knew he could rely upon. All his dispositions were made; he had nothing left but to prepare for death, which he did by prayer. Perchance his prayers were heard; for God, doubtless, saw that his noble mind was a wreck; and who shall presume to measure His mercy, or pronounce judgment for Him?

"I must die," he murmured; "life has lost its crown and honour; my heart is as desolate as my home; and this the end of all!—shame—disgrace—my name tainted—my children a reproach to me! and all through her whom I loved as man has seldom loved, and who has thus repaid the affection of my age!"

With a desperate hand the unhappy man lifted from the chimney-piece of the library a loaded pistol, and placed the muzzle to his temple: his hand was as firm as his resolution.

"God forgive her and me!" he exclaimed, as he pulled the trigger and fell upon the floor a disfigured corse.

The servants, alarmed by the report, rushed into the room, and found their master weltering in his blood. Aid was sent for, but it was found to be useless; the aim had been too true, his hand too steady.

At the very hour the dishonoured husband thus rashly resigned his soul into the hands of his Creator, Faddle was perpetrating his outrage of robbery and murder upon the person of the unfortunate Nancy. Alarmed by the workings of his terror—for conscience he had none—the ruffian made the best of his way towards Dover on foot, intending to embark for France. At Rochester he entered one of the slop-houses frequented by mariners and soldiers, and bought a second-hand cloak and coat, bargaining for them in a niggard spirit on purpose to mislead the shopman as to his position in society: on the contrary, it confirmed him in the opinion he had formed.

"A sharp fellow that," observed the master of the business to the man who had served him. "He knows the value of money, I'll be bound."

"Lightly come, they say, lightly goes," replied the shopman, who was an experienced old hand, and knew a great many more things than his master.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, for all he haggled so closely, he never waited for the sixpence out of his half sovereign. His hands are as white as the church minister's—I only hope they may be as clean. Besides," he added, "didn't you see the look of disgust with which he turned the things over and over, as if they were not good enough for him?"

"Perhaps, poor fellow, he is a runaway bankrupt," observed the master of the shop, with a shrug.

"He looks, in my mind, more like a murderer," replied the man.

The speakers looked in each other's faces; one to see the effect his suspicion had created, the other to see if he was serious.

At this moment the London paper was brought in from the public-house. Mr. Solomons could not exist without his paper. It contained an account both of the suicide of Lord Wilton and the murder of the unfortunate Nancy.

No sooner had the shopman read it than he continued his remarks upon their late customer, by repeating his first observation of "I think he looks more like a murderer."

"Do you think there is any thing to be made out of it?" demanded Solomons, with anxiety in every trait of his avaricious countenance.

"Don't know; I see no reward offered."

"But there will be. It seems the young woman was the blowen of a *barrownight* Whoever did it, prigged her diamonds."

"Diamonds!" repeated the Jew—for the master of the shop belonged to the tribe of Israel; "I wonder what he has done with them. Perhaps a poor man might get a bargain."

"It would be dangerous."

"Not if I unset them. My brother in Holland could dispose of them. He sold some for a king once, a few years ago. Brother Isaac is a respectable man—is rich—and very respectable."

"But how came a king to sell his diamonds?" demanded the shopman.

"Oh, he was not king then, only prince, crippled with debts; so he stole his wife's diamonds, and my brother disposed of them."

"A knowing cove."

"Ay, kings are not always fools. But look!" said the old man, "there goes the stranger off to Canterbury."

"And from Canterbury, I dare be sworn, to Dover, and from Dover to France. But they will find him there if they want him. The Foresters have a keen scent. They never fail, because the fools go the wrong way to work. They fly to Paris, or some large town, forgetting that every house is numbered, every passport registered, and a list and description kept of all who arrive or leave. If they were to mount a blouse, travel on foot, live in villages, they might defy force or cunning. I'd dodge the police of France as easily, ay, more easily than the police of London."

"Master," said the shopman, "I've an idea."

"What is it?"

"Let me follow this fellow to Dover. Perhaps there will be a reward offered by to-morrow. Should our suspicions prove right we will go halves."

"Thirds, you mean," said the Jew, "if I find the money and give up your time."

The bargain was agreed upon, and the man started an hour later in pursuit of his prey.

Although nothing had occurred that could seriously alarm the murderer, conscience told him that justice was upon his track. He felt it instinctively. There is something in the countenance of guilt which attracts men's attention, and causes them to ponder

what it is. Wherever the guilty man directed his steps, he found men's eyes were fixed upon him—that inquiring glances sought to read him. He had lost much of his former presence of mind.

On reaching Dover he took a lodging in a small house for the night facing the port, ordered tea, which he could not taste, and seated himself near the window, yet so shaded by the faded red curtains as to avoid observation, to watch the busy scene before him. The packet was not to sail till an early hour the following morning, and time hung like a nightmare on his hands. His attention was at last excited by the sight of a man conversing mysteriously with a policeman, who appeared to listen attentively to his discourse. He had seen the man's face before, although he felt it impossible, at the moment, to recollect where.

"Damn the fellow!" he muttered, "how nervous he makes me! Every eye seems to be upon me—every one to be trying to read me. There is nothing in my appearance to excite suspicion. I wish I had gone to Folkstone, or embarked at London; both would have been safer than here."

Suddenly he recollected where he had seen the man, and a tremor shook his frame.

"By heavens, the fellow where I bought the clothes! What brings him here? Have I left any thing that could betray me?"

He eagerly searched his pockets; but all was safe; not an article was missing.

Although there was nothing in the man's visit to Dover, so immediately after him, to excite suspicion, still he dared not risk the meeting. Making the best of his way to the back of the house, he passed through the stables into a bye-street, with the intention of returning to London by rail. The hand of Fate was upon him; he felt that he could not, however he might prolong it, shun his destiny. It was night when he arrived. From the low public-house by the water's edge, where he took up his abode, he saw a ship with French colours lying ready to start with the tide.

"What vessel is that?" he demanded of the mistress of the house.

"The Belle Ville," replied the woman, who knew almost every vessel in the port.

"And when does she sail?"

"At three in the morning," said the woman, who began to smell a rat. "The captain is in the bar—would you like to speak with him?"

"Who—I? no, certainly not," replied Faddle, startled at the woman's having read his thoughts; "what should I want with him?"

"There are many gentlemen who prefer sailing quietly with him to going by the regular packets; he is a trustworthy man, and knows what life is. You could see him quite privately in my room above."

"Well," said her guest, "perhaps I may as well have a chat with him; but it is only for company. I have no idea of going to France."

"Of course not," said the landlady, with a knowing look; "but you may as well see him."

As Faddle made no reply, she left the room to inform her guest, rubbing her hands with glee, for she felt convinced that she should make something by the transaction. She had too often been employed in similar affairs not to understand all the fugitive's hesitation.

The captain soon after made his appearance. He was a meagre, dapper little man, with the air of a dancing master more than the appearance of a sailor. Knavery was written in every glance of his keen, dark eye; and, despite his chetive appearance, there was an indication of courage in his features, which were bronzed with the heat of meridian suns.

"You shall wish to see me, sair?" he said, taking the chair which Faddle pointed to.

"Why, yes—that is, I am partial to gentlemen of your country, and always happy to converse with them. I love France."

"France is much honoured to your good love. Beautiful country! Sky—wine—women—all beautiful. Not that," he added, with true French gallantry, "but England is a fine country too—that is, *when* the sun shines—for it does shine sometimes; I have seen it myself."

"But it is not France," observed Faddle, wishing to propitiate him, for he well knew that there is no road to a Frenchman's heart so sure as praising his country.

"Oh, no, it is not France. Do you want to go to France?" he added, significantly.

"To be candid with you—I do."

"Quietly?"

"Quietly."

"Well, I sail with the first tide. I dare say we shall not make much difficulties for the price. Cabin to yourself—food—wine. What you think of five hundred francs?"

The sum, twenty pounds, was a large one, but the fugitive was in no condition to refuse; he agreed to it at once, for he felt that, after having thus far opened his mind to the captain, it would be dangerous to haggle about the price.

"If, when you shall be safe in France, you like to make me a gift, you can," said the Frenchman, bowing. "I know how generous are all milords Anglaise. I take a good many all safe—only sometimes they fetch them back again. One very fine gentleman they brought back, and hung him, poor man; he was very generous, and loved France too."

Although Faddle felt his heart beat at the observation of the captain, he had sufficient command over his countenance not to betray himself by any outward manifestation of agitation, for he felt that an inquiring eye was upon him.

"I have no fear of that," he observed with a laugh, "whatever I may have of my creditors arresting me, for I may as well tell you the truth."

"Of course you have not?" said the captain; "I merely mentioned it as an anecdote of some business. Monsieur has been unlucky in commerce?"

"I have."

"It so often comes. I had one little speculation in a house at Bordeaux myself once; but it failed. However, I have made up for it since. I can feel for gentlemen in commerce."

"He is deceived," thought the murderer to himself; "he takes me for a bankrupt."

"The fool," secretly muttered the Frenchman, "thinks he has blinded me."

It was finally agreed that the captain should send his boat for him to the neighbouring stairs at midnight. Ten pounds was paid down as a deposit, and a cigar smoked over the bargain. As soon as it was dark, Faddle drew his cloak around him, and prepared to leave the tavern, and wile away the time by walking till the boat should be ready; he first asked for his bill—to his astonishment the woman demanded ten pounds.

"Ten pounds!" he mechanically repeated. "Ten shillings, I presume you mean?"

"No, I don't," replied the virago. "You have had every accommodation here. I let you have my own room, introduced you to the captain who is to aid your escape to France, and I expect to be paid for my trouble. You don't leave my house till I am—even," she added, fixing her eyes upon him, "if I am obliged to send for the police to prevent it."

"But this is a robbery," he ventured to observe.

"Not the first, I dare say, that has been committed lately," retorted the landlady, significantly. "I'm a lone woman, and don't choose to be put upon; so if you don't like to pay, like a gentleman, I'll send for those who will quickly find out who and what you are, with your quality airs. I am sure the steak I set before you was good enough for an alderman, and yet you turned up your nose at it!"

"I have not been in good health, landlady," said her guest, willing to pacify her. "There is your money."

Although the woman was hideous, he gallantly added a kiss, as a sweetener; and, drawing his cloak around him, left the house to walk about the neighbourhood till the boat should be waiting for him.

"Well, he is a pretty fellow, whoever he is! Be he baukrupt, thief, or worse, I hope he will get off."

With this charitable wish she entered the bar, and began mixing liquors for her customers.

Faddle wandered for a considerable time up one street and down another, till he was tired. The neighbouring clock had only just struck ten, and he had two hours yet to wait. How time hung upon his hands! Perhaps it was because his heart was heavy that the hours seemed heavy too. As a resource, he entered a coffee-house, and asked for the paper: he had not seen one for two days. The first page that met his view gave an account of the suicide of the unfortunate Earl of Wilton. He read it, and, despite his hardihood, a thrill of remorse ran through him. The next article was headed—"Strange and Mysterious Murder." His heart beat violently. It was the appalling history of his own crime and poor Nancy's fate.

It is the characteristic of guilt to be suspicious. Innocence, fearing nothing, suspects no evil. Crime,

on the contrary, in the simplest action detects a latent motive; its hours are poisoned by watchfulness, its pleasures alloyed by recollection; hope flies from it, and memory is its hell.

Faddle left the coffee-house in a state of mind more easily conceived than described. As far as his coarse sensual nature was capable of feeling the passion, he had loved the girl, and certainly never contemplated the taking of her life when he thrust the pillow over her face to drown her cries—hence his terror and remorse were increased by regret for the violence which had destroyed her. After wandering through the crowded neighbourhood till the church clock struck the appointed hour, he made the best of his way to the water-side, where the men were to meet him with the boat. In his way the suspicion crossed him that the captain might have heard something, or might suspect something, and he determined to reconnoitre before he ventured too near.

For about twenty yards before reaching the wharf where the boat was waiting, was a low brick wall, running on either side of the half-rotten embankment; the piles which supported it were covered with slime and the green weed of the river. The fugitive, stooping as low as was necessary to conceal his person, crept cautiously along till he reached the opening leading to the water, when he gradually raised himself till he could peep over the summit of the wall; as he did so, he heard voices—they proceeded from two sailors in the boat, who had been sent by the captain to bring him off.

"I wish the land-shark would come," said one of the tars, who was smoking a short pipe. "I say, Bill, what has the cove done?"

"No good, or he would not sail in our craft," replied his companion. "The skipper has been looking over the papers ever since he came on board, but he can't find it out. I heard him say that he s'p'osed the fellow was a bankrupt, and wanted to cheat his creditors."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"What's the use of his going to France if it's any thing *wus?* The skipper is sure to tell the French police to keep a look-out on him, and they'll follow him from town to town till he is wanted, and then they claps a grip on him. That's how they served the last three we took over."

"Ay, ay. The last *served him jolly well right*—he was a murderer."

Faddle trembled—he felt as if he was listening to his own doom.

"Oh, this is nuffin of that sort. I heard the skipper say, at worst it's only a bit of forgery. I think he seed something about it in the paper."

The criminal breathed a little more freely. Just as he was about to descend the steps he saw a policeman coming. He could not, although he wished to make the effort—he dared not descend and get into the boat before him. With a groan of despair he rose from his crouching position, crossed over the street, and walked away. The hand of retribution was on him.

The tide had turned, and preparations were being made on board for getting the vessel under weigh, before Faddle found courage to venture to leave the land. Groping his way to a small boat which its owner had left chained to one of the numerous landing-places, he seated himself in it. The oars, fortunately, had been left; he cast off, and rowed rapidly towards the ship.

As he proceeded down the river, voices seemed to call after him; the night-breeze, heavy with dew, fell upon his burning cheek, but instead of cooling it served only to increase the fever of his blood. The fire of remorse within his heart was as unquenchable as that eternal fire to which he felt he was doomed. Still he rowed desperately on, for the fear had struck him that he should be too late for the ship; and brave the eyes of the crowd which usually assemble to watch the departure of the regular packets he dared not—his craven soul was chained by conscience and by terror.

"Humph!" said the Frenchman, shrugging his shoulders when he saw his passenger set foot upon the deck of the little vessel; "I see, sair, you are an old soldier; not much easy to catch you, *mais diable!* You have no fear now; once in France, you can laugh at your enemies."

"Oh, yes," replied Faddle; "I might be very happy there, if I could only find some one to advise me, some one to whom I could entrust the management of a profitable affair in England."

At the word "profitable," the captain pricked up his ears. Like most of his countrymen, he was any thing for gain. He assured his passenger that from the first moment he saw him he felt an interest in his favour; that he should be proud to serve him in any way he could point out, and concluded by an allusion to the consolation which friendship and confidence give the heart in the hour of affliction.

The murderer secretly smiled at the eagerness with which the Frenchman took the bait, but he knew the character of the man from the bargain he had driven for the passage-money, and the conversation he had overheard between the sailors in the boat, and he determined to use him to his purposes; in fact, to use an old proverb, they must have had long legs who ran a race with Faddle.

"My very dear friend," said the captain, "come down to my cabin; I have beautiful cigars and brandy to make you happy."

His passenger was easily persuaded; for, after the exertion of rowing, the night air, together with the dews rising from the river, began to chill his blood. Following the Frenchman, therefore, he dived down the companion-ladder after him, and soon found himself seated in a snug little cabin, arranged with that taste and neatness which characterise the nation to which the vessel belonged—for, no matter whether in the humblest cottage or most elegant saloon in France, a certain perception of the graceful is always apparent in the mode of arranging them. The same taste is displayed in their vessels—they may not always be what a British tar would call ship-shape, but they are pretty.

Cigars were handed out from the locker, and brandy and hot water placed upon the table by the captain, who left his guest for a few minutes to go on deck while the anchor was being raised. During his absence, Faddle had time to arrange his plans and collect his thoughts. A sinister smile passed over his features as he heard the Frenchman's foot descending the ladder; the ship, too, he felt was under weigh.

"Ah! ah! Mensieur Anglais, you make yourself comfortable, I hope. Damn! what a word it is—comfortable! England invent it to express a want which no other people experience. Curious people de English; but I do love them; they buy all my brandies, and pay like princes."

Faddle merely nodded his head, and continued to puff away at his cigar.

"But you have some confidence to make me—a grand affair?"

"Can I trust you?" said the passenger.

"Can you trust me!" repeated the captain, in a tone which was intended to convey how much he felt hurt by the question; "of course you can. *Sacre Dieu!* I am Frenchman and full of honour—never betray any thing in my life. Trust me! yes, with all the gold in the Bank of England; I would not run away with it."

"I believe you," said Faddle, eyeing his spindle legs; "the weight of a tenth part of it would crush you."

The latter observation he kept to himself, for he knew that to offend a Frenchman's vanity was the surest way to make him your enemy for life.

"And you will trust me?" demanded the former, his eyes sparkling with cupidity.

"I will."

They drew their stools closer together and replenished their tumblers. It was a contest of shrewdness between the two men—each wished to deceive the other; but as one was incited by avarice, and the other by the love of life, the instinct of self-preservation, it is not wonderful that the more powerful motive prevailed.

"Now then, my dear friend, perhaps you will be sick before you reach Calais—tell me all."

"Well, then," sighed Faddle, "I am a bankrupt."

"I guessed as much."

"But not a poor one."

"Of course not; *poor bankrupts* do not run away, they have nothing to conceal; dull rogues, who leave every thing to their creditors, and feel a fool's pride in paying to the last sixpence. But you," he added, "are not one of these; there is too much finesse in your countenance."

"You flatter me."

"No, on my honour. But tell me, how can I serve you? Ah, my dear friend, I am so impatient to prove to you that my attachment is sincere."

"Unfortunately, the greater part of what I have saved from the wreck is in London."

"Diable! where did you leave it?"

"In a small trunk at the western station, where it will remain till called for. Here is the ticket, on producing which they will deliver it up."

The speaker produced an old luggage ticket, which he happened to have in his pocket, and had not been asked for when his luggage had been given up.

"And what is it you require?" demanded the captain.

"A faithful friend who would go over to England and demand the trunk. I can afford to pay him well for his services."

"You may find it difficult," said the captain, hesitatingly, "to change your notes in Paris. Most likely the numbers are all known and placarded on the Bourse by this time."

"There is not an English note in the trunk."

"What then? gold?"

"No," said Faddle, secretly amused at the eagerness with which the question was asked; "bills of the Bank of France—payable to the bearer—no questions asked. Let me but once get them into my possession, and I'll live *en seigneur*."

"Why did you not go for them yourself?" demanded the captain.

"Did you ever hear of the devil's last invention?" said his passenger.

"No; what was it?"

"The electric telegraph, which annihilates time, and contracts space into so small a compass that it catches whatever is between it. I wandered past the terminus, knew that my treasure was there, entered the office under pretence of making an inquiry, thought the clerk eyed me suspiciously, and though the question was on my tongue, and the paper in my hand, I dared not speak it. I was nervous, too nervous to risk it."

"I understand you. I have felt nervous several times in my life myself."

"No time must be lost," resumed the pretended bankrupt. "If you can find me a messenger on whom you can depend, who will return to London by this night's packet, and bring me the treasure over, I will reward him liberally, make him independent of the world for life."

"How much does the trunk contain?"

"One hundred thousand pounds."

"Whew! you have take away all mine breath. Why that is—let me see—yes, it is two millions five hundred thousand francs. My dear friend, I will go for it myself."

"You are too kind," said Faddle.

"Not at all, not at all. My God! should the land-sharks get it, I should never forgive myself! Let me have the paper; I will return by the boat to-night. We shall be in time. My God! two millions five hundred thousand francs!"

"But where am I to wait your return?"

"At my house," replied the captain, hastily. "Do you think I would suffer a friend worth two millions five hundred thousand francs to go to an inn? I should never forgive myself. No, I have a little cottage just outside the gates, where you can remain as long as you please. They will not ask for your passport there, so have no fears. I am glad I have met you, very glad."

Had the speaker been able to read all that was passing in the mind of his passenger, he would have changed his opinion.

By the time they reached Calais, the murderer's courage felt re-assured, and he began to blame himself for his precipitate departure from England. The captain, who had a project of his own, which rendered it desirable that the person of his passenger should not be recognised, persuaded him to put on a sailor's dress, and one of those coarse red duffle shirts so common on board the French ships. Thus attired, soon after they had anchored, Faddle followed the captain on shore, carrying his cloak and carpet-bag with him. The Custom-House officers and the police naturally thought he was one of the crew following his commander with his luggage. As the captain was well known, a nod was all that passed between them. No questions were asked, or examination made; and in a short time they were both seated in the comfortable saloon of the Frenchman's house, outside the walls of Calais, a well-spread table and a bottle of Bordeaux before them.

"This I call comfortable," said the host, "although it is not English comfort."

"I don't dislike it the worse for that just now," observed his guest, with a faint smile.

"I dare say not. Your health, sair."

And the captain drank off his bumper in honour of the supposed possessor of two million five hundred thousand francs.

"Tell me," said Faddle, "what time does the packet sail?"

"At midnight."

"And you are determined to proceed?" he added, fixing an anxious look upon him.

"True as steel!" replied the Frenchman. "I will but walk down to my partner, to let him know that business of importance will detain me from the vessel for two days; for it is not worth while to let him know any thing about my trip to London; and then I shall be ready to start. You will remain here?"

"If you wish it."

"If I wish it!" repeated the captain, reproachfully; "of course I wish it. Where else would you be so safe? You will find plenty of cigars in the sea-chest, and some old Bordeaux in the cellar; so make yourself as happy as you can till my return."

"But I shall see you before you start?"

"At furthest in an hour; then, as the night is dark, you can, if you like, walk down to the pier with me. Had you not better give me the paper," he added, "at once?"

"When you are ready."

"Oh, that will do as well," growled the captain, who saw in the reluctance of his guest to part with the paper a fresh proof of the veracity of his story; and he secretly chuckled at the good fortune which had placed so rich a dupe in his hands.

About an hour before the vessel started he returned to his cottage, to summon his guest to walk with him to the pier. He had already given directions to his servant—a pretty Norman lass, whose black laughing eyes and red lips, in her master's opinion, amply compensated for her want of experience in housekeeping—that she was to treat his English friend in every respect like himself while he was away.

"In every respect?" said the girl archly.

"*Sacre Dieu!* no!" growled her master, with a pang of jealousy; "if I thought that, I'd twist his neck before I left him."

"Don't be jealous," said Lisette (the name of the girl); "poor John Bull seems to have too much upon his mind to make room for love in his heart. I dare wager a pair of gloves that if you ask him he won't be able to tell the colour of my eyes, although I waited on you both at table."

The speaker spoke confidently, and her master felt reassured; but both were mistaken. Faddle had observed the colour of her eyes, and rather liked them.

"You will be able to find your way back to the house?" whispered the Frenchman, as they stood together by the gate leading to the harbour.

"Easily," said Faddle, placing the paper in his hands. "For heaven's sake, be careful! Remember, I trust my fortune in your hands."

"All right," said the captain; "you are not the first one who has done so. Come," he added, "here is a house close by, kept by a countryman of yours; a parting glass, and then I am off."

His guest, suffering himself to be persuaded to the very thing he wished, entered a low public-house facing the ramparts, known by the sign of the Ship. It was the rendezvous of broken-down Englishmen—servants, and the disreputable fry which Calais swarms with—touters, waiters, Nottingham factory boys and girls employed in the lace trade.

"Two glasses of brandy," said the captain.

Just as they were placed upon the edge of the bar he turned round to speak to his mate, who followed him to receive some directions respecting the vessel. Faddle seized the occasion, and dropped into his glass a pinch of tasteless powder which he kept in his waistcoat-pocket. The same drug had won him many a hundred pounds at the race-course. Given to a horse, it produced stupefaction and debility; to a man, it was death.

"Your health, sair," said the Frenchman, draining his glass.

"And yours."

"Here's to our next meeting."

"With all my heart," said Faddle, draining his glass.

"Adieu!" exclaimed the captain; "the bell is ringing, I shall be too late. I will take care of the trunk. *Mon Dieu!*" he added, "but I have a strange sickness at my heart; it will not last long, I suppose. Adieu, my good friend; make yourself at home till I return. Here, give me another glass of brandy."

It was given and drunk. The poisoner conducted his victim to the packet, saw him on board, and advised him, on his complaining of sickness, to retire to bed; which the poor fellow promised to do, and bade God bless him as he left him.

"Fool!" muttered the assassin, as the vessel receded from the harbour, "the voyage on which thou art bound is death—'tis thy last trip, rover of the seas. What dull fools he must have met with," he continued, "to think to blind me by a veil so flimsy, a device so transparent! With all their finesse I'd back Newmarket against his nation any day—ay, and give the odds too. Now then to the cottage; for one day at least I am secure; time is gained, and that to a man of resolution is every thing."

With these words the speaker quietly lit another cigar, and returned to the house of the man whom he had so coolly sent to his last account.

The unfortunate captain, who had looked upon his passenger as a buzzard, a dupe to be easily plucked, had not left the shore more than an hour, before he was seized with violent spasms, and roared lustily for brandy in the hope that the stimulant would allay them. Unfortunately, the vessel was so crowded with passengers that he was unable to procure a berth. Considerable uneasiness manifested itself amongst the crowd as his illness increased; for the cholera, that scourge which outraged Asia has sent to Europe to punish her oppressors, was at the very time prevalent in France, and however courageous the French may be in a military point of view, there is not a people in the world more timid at the appearance of pestilence. The bridegroom, under the terror of the scourge, has been known to fly from his bride, the wife from her husband, the parent from its child. The ties which poverty could not have shaken, melted like sunbeams before the dread of Europe's latest scourge.

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the unhappy man. "Is there not a doctor on board? I am dying—a priest—a doctor—brandy! *Sacre!* to die thus like a dog!"

The terror-stricken crowd drew from the captain as far as the limits of the vessel would permit. Terror was visible in the countenances of all, and several began to call out that the sufferer ought to be taken down into the hold, as a precaution to prevent danger to the rest.

"Give him some brandy," said the commander of the packet.

No one stirred to obey him. The order was repeated, and a poor negro boy at last ventured to approach and place a bottle of spirits within reach of the dying man, who hastily put it to his lips, and drank off about a third of its contents. The action of the spirit upon the poison only served to increase

upon the deck, and yelled with pain, till those who heard him were almost as terrified at his sufferings as if they had felt the approach of death themselves; and one old lady, who was noted for her benevolence and piety in the little town where she resided, quoted something about Jonah having been cast overboard to save the rest; thereby plainly hinting her opinion that it was not only expedient, but lawful, to treat the captain in the same way, in order to prevent the infection spreading. Many secretly agreed with her.

"My eyes! did you hear that?" cried a Nottingham lace-weaver, who had been settled for some years in Calais, where his trade once flourished. "Faith! that old woman wants to pitch the poor devil overboard."

"And a sensible thought too," replied his more timid companion, who began to feel very sick. "What right have we to be *pisoned* by a French varmint like that? It aint wholesome; and if I was the skipper, I——"

The rest of the sentence was cut short by a lurch of the vessel, which sent the speaker to the bulwarks, suffering from that worst of maladies, sea sickness, which, in his terror, he imagined to be cholera, and the supposition made him worse.

The senses of the poisoned man began to wander. In his ravings he spoke of a bankrupt and millions, cursed his unlucky stars, and threatened death to any who might attempt to rob him. The scene now became so really frightful that the commander of the packet felt himself bound to interfere, for several of the female passengers had fainted.

Calling to him the black boy and an old sailor, whose fears of the pestilence had not unnerved him like the others, he directed them to take the sufferer down into the hold of the vessel, give him some more brandy, and fasten him down. They heard their orders in silence, and reluctantly prepared to obey them. A violent paroxysm had just ended when they approached the captain to execute their task, but no sooner did he feel their hands upon his person than he started up, and with a giant strength dashed them from him, calling out "A mutiny!" It was clear he fancied himself on board his own ship, and that his men had revolted against him.

"*A moi! a moi!*" he shrieked; "I am your captain. The first who refuses to obey me swings at the yard-arm! Treachery! treachery!"

"He raves," observed one.

"How very dreadful!" observed the old lady. "Why don't they throw him over? I am sure he will do some mischief before he dies!"

The maniac, for such he had become, seized a piece of spar lying on the deck, and still labouring under the impression that his men had revolted against his authority, rushed upon the passengers, who were crowded together at the prow of the vessel, striking furiously right and left. The shrieks of the women became fearful.

"Strike him down!" roared the captain of the packet.

"Who will strike me down?" demanded the maniac, rushing towards the commander. "Traitor! I am master here! *A moi, mes Francais!* hand up my arms! Down with the mutineers!"

With the fury of a demon glistening in his eyes, he sprang upon the paddle-box in order to reach the object of his insane fury, who clung to the shrouds to escape him.

Although the leap was a hazardous one, he contrived to reach it, but at the moment he did so, his foot slipped, and he fell into the sea. The vessel dashed on, and he sank amid the foam of her track.

"Thank God," said the old lady, with a complaisant smile; "how very fortunate!"

Many agreed with her, but few ventured to repeat her words.

Three days afterwards, when the news arrived of the captain's death, his brother, who kept a small auberge in the lower town of Calais, made his appearance at the cottage, and as no will was to be found, claimed every thing. Poor Lisette, who had long been an object of jealousy to his greedy relative, was turned, without pity or ceremony, adrift; even her wages as a servant were disputed, and her trunks examined previous to her leaving, to see that they contained nothing which the rapacious innkeeper could claim. While the wretched girl stood sobbing at the gate, waiting for the diligence which was to carry her with a blighted reputation to Guines, her native place, Faddle, whose amorous propensities had revived, saw her regret and shame with secret joy. He well knew that her present state of mind would induce her to accept any offer, rather than brave the contempt of her native village, and the sneers of her former companions.

"Well, Lisette," he said, "you had better have thought twice of my offer before you refused it."

"Thank you, monsieur," said the girl; "but it requires no second thought. If I have fallen once from the path of virtue, it is no reason I should do so a second time."

"Pshaw! what is virtue but a name?"

"A name is every thing sometimes, monsieur."

"Ay," resumed the libertine, "while it is unstained; but have you reflected how pitiless the world is to an error like yours? Men may fall and redeem themselves—women never."

"I know, I know!" sobbed Lisette.

"Have you sisters?"

"Two, monsieur, both good girls; the eldest is about to be married to an honest young man, who once had thoughts of me till I proved that I was unworthy of his love."

"You will have a pleasant reception at home!"

"We must all bear the penalty of our faults. I wish," she added, "that the diligence would come; I am sure it is past the hour."

"It wants twenty minutes yet," replied Faddle; "hear me, Lisette, I will be candid and truthful to you, and that is what those of my sex seldom are to yours. I love you; from the first moment I saw you, you struck my fancy. I am not what the world would call rich, but I have an honest competence. It is my intention to enter into business in Paris—you could assist me. I am neither old nor ill-looking. I promise to treat you like a man of honour. Take your choice—happiness on one side, contempt and humiliation on the other. Can you hesitate?"

"So soon," said the girl, crying, "after the death of—of——no, no, I cannot!"

"I promise to respect you till you have recovered your natural grief for the loss of your friend. Come," he added, "let us start at once for Paris."

It were needless to repeat all the arguments which the artful villain used to work upon the mind of his destined dupe,—how he painted the cold reception she would meet with from her parents, and the disdain of her sisters, the contempt of her former companions. Enough that he prevailed, and the poor girl, torn with remorse and shame, at last consented

to accompany him to the capital. On their arrival they took an apartment in the Rue de Prince, not far from the Pantheon. It was one of the most quiet residences in Paris, and he wished to see how affairs stood in England before he ventured to make his appearance in public, where he would doubtless be recognised by some of his former acquaintance. No sooner were they settled than he sent his companion, who knew Paris well, to purchase the English papers in the Palais-Royal. It seemed an age until she returned. He perused them with avidity, without finding a word that could alarm his suspicions. A second time fortune seemed to have favoured him. He made an excellent supper that night.

His unhappy companion, who weakly imagined that he would keep his word and respect her sorrow, was preparing a bed for herself upon the sofa, an operation which Faddle observed with one of those quiet smiles which always denoted mischief. She really was very pretty, and he felt impatient to possess her.

"What are you doing there?" he demanded.

"Preparing for the night," answered the girl, blushing deeply. "Remember your promise."

"Of course I shall remember it," he replied, at the same time pulling her to him. "But won't it look strange to the proprietors of the house, with whom we pass as man and wife, if they discover that we sleep separately? Come," he added, "we must be prudent."

"Only a week; spare me for a week," said Lisette, crying.

"What difference will a week make? You will get over your grief all the sooner afterwards."

His eager hands began to unloosen her dress; which, despite her struggles, he accomplished.

"This is ungenerous!" she cried. "Oh, for pity—"

A shower of kisses stopped her words; and the next night the poor girl did not attempt to prepare her bed upon the sofa; it was too late for that.

At an early hour the following morning Faddle visited the Palais-Royal, and purchased suitable attire. In that emporium of fashion and wealth, a beggar might enter in rags, and, if he had money in his purse, quit it dressed fit for the banquet of a prince. All that the wildest passions can desire, caprice imagine, or luxury invent, may be obtained within its precincts, provided you have the master-key—gold. With that in Paris you are a god—without it, an outcast in a desert. And yet Paris is not more inhospitable than all great cities; for, strange to say, the greater the congregation of humanity, the less humanity is to be found there. Lisette scarcely knew him on his return, so great was the alteration a French tailor had made. A faint smile, the first since she had heard of the captain's death, played upon her lips, as she glanced at his showy person. It was plain to perceive that it would not be long before she was perfectly reconciled to the exchange. It was the rascal's fate to be loved—the worthless in this world generally are so.

"Come, Lisette," he said, "these things did all very well in the country; but here, in Paris, you will be stared at. I need not advise you in your choice—for all Frenchwomen possess natural taste. There," he added, throwing her a purse containing thirty Napoleons, "go and gratify the natural propensity of your sex; not that I shall love you better for your finery."

Few women can resist gold and a compliment at the same time, especially from a good-looking fellow. This time Lisette really smiled, and she almost forgave him his breach of promise.

"And have you nothing to give me in return?" he demanded.

The reply was sealed upon his lips, and the deluded girl started upon her expedition.

"Humph!" said Faddle, as she descended the stairs. "I have found the key to her heart. In a week she will love me—in a fortnight be my slave. No bad speculation. A French wife will prevent suspicion, and I can cast her off at any time. I wonder where Wilmott and Rose have hid themselves. We shall meet again—something whispers me that we are sure to meet again. Our game of life is not yet played out."

Taking advantage of Lisette's absence, he removed the diamonds, which he had concealed about his person, and carefully unset them. Beating the thin gold work till it was impossible even for the jeweller who had made the necklace to recognise his own work, for still further security, when he left the house in the evening he contrived to drop the mountings into the Seine. He breathed more freely when he heard the splash in the water. Poor Nancy! little did she think, when she placed the jewels on her neck, that they would prove the cause of her untimely death.

Lisette returned in high spirits. Her natural vanity was gratified at the finery which her paramour's liberality enabled her to indulge in; and she displayed her purchases with all the eagerness of a pleased child before him.

"Now, what are you smiling at?" she demanded; "I will know."

"Must I tell?"

"You must."

"Well, then, I was thinking what pretty widow's weeds these coloured silks would make."

The poor girl burst into tears, and pushed the finery from her. He had touched a chord in her heart whose vibration was painful; for it struck upon her better feelings.

"Take back your gifts," she sobbed; "take them back. I deserve the reproach, but not from you! the world may despise me; but you have no right—you who have taken advantage of my weakness, my desolate position, my unprotected state, to make me what I am. But you are like all Englishmen—proud, selfish, and unpitying."

Faddle perceived his error, and with the skill of an experienced *roue* hastened to soothe her; for, independent of her being an agreeable companion and her person desirable, he intended to make her useful in the advancement of his fortunes. Her living with him was also a protection; for it disarmed suspicion.

"Come, Lisette," he whispered, drawing her to his knee, "you must forgive me. I thought the wound in your heart was healed, or I would not have ventured on so unkind a jest. I am sufficiently punished in your tears and anger. There," he added, kissing her, "dry your eyes; weeping will only make them look dim and spoil their lustre. I'll not offend again. Come, kiss and be friends."

"Never say such another unkind word," replied the girl, endeavouring to smile, "if you wish me to remain with you. The reproaches of my own heart I can bear, but not yours. You think, I suppose, because I am country-bred, and received little or no education, that I am without pride or feeling. Undeceive yourself, monsieur; the poorest peasant may possess both."

"And yet I wonder how, possessed of such character, you yielded to the captain's solicitations?"

"I did not yield to them," replied Lisette.

"How! did he use violence?" demanded Faddle.

"No—I can scarcely tell. When I was a child he used, on his return from sea, to bring every voyage some token of his regard for his little wife, and I, with the innocence of my age, repaid him for them with kisses, such as childhood bestows on those it loves. Gradually his kisses grew warmer as I increased in stature and in years; but my heart was still a child's; and from caresses he proceeded to still greater freedoms. I thought them strange, but from him suspected no harm, dreamt of no wrong, and suffered him, when I was but fourteen years of age, to despoil me of that gem which is woman's crown of honour, before I knew its value or could regret its loss."

"He was a villain!" said Faddle, who envied the dead man his first possession of the speaker.

"He was a man," replied Lisette, "and all men are unjust where women are concerned. In your passions you regard us as natural prey, and the old debauchée cheers on the rising libertine in his course. There is not a pin to choose between you all."

"Not in love?" said the libertine, with a smile, which the girl, who really began to entertain a passion for him, returned; "not in love?"

"Well, in love there may be a difference. And now," she added, "to recompense me for the pain you have occasioned me, you must consent to one thing."

"What is that?" inquired Faddle, who expected a demand upon his liberality in the shape of a watch, or a pair of ear-rings, or some other trinket.

"Instead of going with you to Versailles to-morrow, let me give the money to the curé of St. Roche for masses for the repose of the poor captain's soul. I know you English laugh at the idea; but if it does him no good, it will at least gratify me."

"That is the most sensible part about it. Have your wish."

"You consent, then?"

"I do, but on one condition—that we do not lose our trip to Versailles. Say as many masses for the dead lover as you will, so you only smile upon the living one. I am something of a materialist," he added, "in my affections, and shall never feel jealous of a dead rival, whatever I might do of a living one."

The arrangement was agreed to, and peace once more established between them.

The following day Faddle, taking with him the centre diamond of the necklace, proceeded to a jeweller's in the Palais-Royal, and showing him the gem, asked him to value it.

"Is it for sale?" demanded the man.

"Perhaps that would depend upon the sum offered."

"In that case," replied the man, "I should expect to be paid my commission. The knowledge necessary to judge the value of the diamond is not obtained without years of experience and labour. When monsieur considers this he will not deem the observation unreasonable. Permit me also to add that I am always willing to purchase at the price I estimate them at."

The arrangement was made, and the stone produced. The merchant's eyes sparkled as he examined it, for it was a gem of rare size and beauty. He weighed it, placed it on a black velvet-covered tray, so as to catch the prismatic rays in every possible position. With all his ingenuity he could not detect a single flaw. It was perfect.

"Well, what do you say to it?" demanded the libertine. "It is one of the right sort, is it not?"

"It is."

"And at what sum do you value it?"

"Ten thousand francs."

"Which in English money is exactly four hundred pounds. Well, it is yours at that price."

The money was paid, and no further questions asked. The jeweller, who had a large order to execute for Russia, was delighted with his purchase, of which, as an honest tradesman, he expected to make the moderate sum of cent. per cent.; but, as he usually assured his customers, he was satisfied with small profits.

With the sum thus obtained Faddle easily found means to get introduced into one of the numerous gaming houses which, despite the vigilance of the police, exist in Paris, either through their connivance, or the extreme precaution used to avoid detection. Here he indulged in his natural propensity for play. At first Fortune seemed to favour him. For several weeks he had a run of luck, and at one time his winnings exceeded two thousand pounds. The fickle goddess changed her smiles into frowns at last; and the moment arrived in which he was compelled to part with another of his diamonds. This time he went to a Jew in the Rue St. Lazar. He was too cautious to visit, on a similar errand, the Palais-Royal again. As he was proceeding to the shop, towards the dusk of the evening, a man, muffled up in a cloak, passed hastily by him: there was something in his appearance and walk which Faddle thought he recognised; but as he soon lost sight of him the circumstance quickly passed from his memory. Mr. Isaacs was an English Jew money-changer, lender, broker, agent of offices—in short, a well-known factotum for the English. There was no commission which he was too delicate to undertake, from the disposal of stolen notes to the brokerage between an opera girl and some rich fool whose passion was to possess her. He had an eye like a hawk, and a voice as soft as a dove's, when he had any thing to gain; at other times he could be harsh and boisterous enough. He saw at once that his visitor was an Englishman; for dress as they will in Paris, the English are sure to be recognised by some peculiarity of gait or manner.

"Vell, where did you get them?" demanded the Israelite, eyeing his customer curiously. He had frequently thrown experienced cracksmen off their guard by the suddenness of the same question; but this time he had to do with an experienced hand, a fellow quite as cool and knowing as himself.

Elevating his eyebrows to an angle, indicating extreme surprise at the presumption of the Jew, his visitor quietly demanded what possible interest it could be to him to know where he procured them. "I suppose, my good man," he added, "you do not think I stole them?"

"Vhy—vell—not exactly; but we do see some curious things in Paris; still, if a gentleman is a gentleman, and is pushed to sell diamonds, or any thing else, I am always ready to oblige him as far as I can with safety. And now I recollect, I think I saw you the other evening at the opera in the same box with Lord George Seymour."

"Forget our present meeting," said Faddle, pretending to be vexed at the recognition, although secretly pleased at it, "should you see me there again. But I am in haste. What do you offer for the stones? Name your price."

"Vell, I von't be hard—a hnndred pounds," said Isaacs, with a sigh.

"Ay," said Faddle, 'qnietly putting them in his pocket. "I see yon imagine I stole them. A hnndred pounds! Why, my aunt—I mean," he added, adroitly pretending to correct himself, "I gave nearly three hnndred pounds for them."

"Buying and selling are different things," said the disappointed Jew, who found that if he wished to do business he must act with something like common honesty.

"So it appears," said Faddle, bnttoning np his coat and walking towards the door of the shop.

"Vell, let me look at them again."

"You have seen them qnite enongh to valne them already."

"Stop, stop. Oh, you gentlemen, you won't let a poor fellow live. Hear me; I'll give one hnndred and fifty; and, as I am an honest man, I shonld lose if I were to give a farthing more. There's a speck in the larger one."

"Which donbtless adds to its value, for I saw that yon admired it the most. Say a hundred and eighty, and they are yours."

"So help me Abraham, they are not worth it."

"Good evening."

"A hnndred and sixty," roared the Jew.

"Good evening."

"A hnndred and seventy."

Faddle walked ont of the shop, but was qnickly followed by Mr. Isaacs, who told him with a sigh, that although he felt convinced he should lose by the bargain, yet, in the hope that he would prove a customer to him some futnre time, he shonld have the money

The transaction was soon concinded, and Faddle, pocketing the notes, sanntered leisnrely down the street till he reached the Bonlevards.

"He mnst be a gentleman," said the Jew to himself; "a prig would have snapped at my offer. Vell, vell," he added, "it's not a bad bargain after all. I shall make fifty ponnds by the pnrchase. I wonder if he has got any more"

Just as Faddle tnrned the corner of the Rue St. Lazar, the same person who, in his way to the diamond merchant's, had attracted his attention again crossed his path. This time he canght a better view of his countenance, and recognised, despite the ravages which disease and remorse had made in his former friend and dupe, the nnhappy Wilmott.

"Why, Dick," he exclaimed, holding ont his hand with every appearance of cordiality, "is that yon?"

"All that sorrow and remorse have left of me"

"Hang sorrow, and damn remorse. Men who have lived as we have done shonld regret nothing. Ask yonrself the ntility. Will it recal the past?"

"No."

"To provide for the fntnre?"

"No."

"Where, then, is its utility—*cui bono*, as we used to say at school? Yon see I dabbled in my hnmanities once. But tell me, where are you living?"

"Close by."

"And Rose?"

"Gets more and more wretched every day. If I leave her but for an hour, on my retnrn I find her in tears. Mine, Frank, was an ill-assorted marriage. Believe me that gold never yet bonght the heart of any hnman being, whatever it may have done the person."

"Why, yon have turned philosopher, Dick," observed his qnondam friend.

"I have had nothing else to do lately."

"As well that, then," continued Faddle, "as any thing else. But come, man, yon want excitement to clear this meagrim in yonr blood. Here yon are, like a hermit, in the centre of fashion and pleasure, burying yonrself like a grub in a hole, instead of fluttering from flower to flower like a bntterfly. Come, what say yon—shall we make a night of it? I am going to a jovial party, and shall be happy to introdnce you."

"No, no; I am unfit for society now," said Wilmott.

"And will get still more so, if you continne to lead this wretched life. Come, you shall not refuse me. I will be yonr mind's physician, and wash your brain of its regrets and gloom—put a new life in you, and make yon the Dick Wilmott of the olden time—the life of society, and prince of good fellows."

"Never," said his dnpe, with a faint smile; "I am qnite broken."

"No man is ever broken unless he wills it; at least not in mind. Pocket, I grant you, is a different thing. There I own we are all liable. Come," he added, "try my recipe for once, and if yon find that it disagrees with you, I won't ask yon to repeat the dose. But for one night!"

Wilmott, whose spirits were wretched, and who songht in any change relief, snffered himself to be persnaded to what Faddle wished; and he agreed to meet his former friend in an honr's time at the Palais-Royal.

"Bnt why in an hour's time?" inquired Faddle, "Why not accompany me now?"

Wilmott pleaded his toilette, and the necessity he was under of informing Rose that he was going out for the evening, that she might not be alarmed at his absence. As his reasons were too plausible to be disputed, his companion was obliged to acquiesce; and they separated, promising to meet in an honr.

"Would he were dead!" muttered the ruffian, as he directed his steps towards home. "I'd give fifty to see him in the grave. He knows too much for my safety. He is one of those whimpering knaves who feel a conscience in poverty, and, when pleasnre and the means of gratifying escape them, seek a snbstitnte in repentance. Would he were dead!"

Fnll of this idea, he reflected in his way home on the means of accomplishing his pnrpose; for immunity in crime had now so completely hardened him, that he felt neither pity nor remorse for his numerous victims. He was a perfect incarnation of self, bent only on the gratification of his own evil passions.

At the appointed time they met at the place of rendezvous.

"Where do you propose to spend the evening?" demanded Wilmott.

"At the Count de Villa's," replied his friend.

"An Italian?"

"Yes."

"A mere bachelor's party, I suppose?"

"Then, for once in your life, yon suppose wrongly. He is too gallant to confine his hospitality to men. No, Dick; women will be there—divine, spirited creatures, full of passion and love; things to turn both heart and brain, and make the blood run riot even in the veins of an anchorite. But I need not dilate; you know by this time what Frenchwomen are, or yon have wasted yonr hours in Paris to little pnrpose."

"It has indeed passed drearily. There is no play, I trust?"

"Sometimes."

"Then I'll not go," said Wilmott firmly.

"Pshaw!" replied the tempter; "'tis merely child's play. The women join, and frequently stake more than their money. You understand? Cupid holds the stakes, and love pays forfeit."

Wilmott was too weak and too wretched to hold out. Excitement promised forgetfulness, and forgetfulness to him was happiness; for, from continually brooding on his crime, he had sunk into a morbid state almost bordering upon insanity. Indeed at times poor Rose trembled for his reason.

Jumping into a fiacre, they drove to the Rue Richelieu, the residence of the Count de Villa, who kept open house for all who were properly introduced or had money to lose. His doors were only shut to those whom he had plundered.

The party assembled at the Count de Villa's was a mixed company of English and other foreigners. There were comparatively few French there, and those chiefly well-dressed, showy women, of more than doubtful character. Although the meeting was styled a *conversazione*, the real purpose was play; music and conversation were merely the blinds to mislead the police, who had long had an eye upon the house, and strong suspicions as to the real pursuits of its master, whose antecedents in his own country rendered a residence in Paris more than convenient—it was necessary to his safety. He was a tall, stout man, about fifty, whose grey moustache and closely cropped hair gave him a military appearance, of which he was not a little vain. He possessed that vulgar style of beauty which characterises the low adventurer. The great decoy was Madame la Contesse, whose manners were really elegant, and whose pale, intelligent features bespoke, to a close observer, a heart but ill at ease. At times, when the eyes of her husband encountered hers, which they frequently would when she appeared lost in abstraction, the guests would observe an involuntary shudder creep over her, and she instantly exerted herself to promote conversation and gaiety, with the eagerness of a child who had been caught neglecting its task. Men frequently used to say they were an ill-assorted pair-

One thing at least was certain—that, whatever accident had brought them in contact—for few believed that they were really married—natnre had evidently intended them to move in different spheres.

Faddle, who had been previously introdnced, presented his friend as an Englishman. Supposed to be rich, they were graciously received. Wilmott's qniet manners and gentlemanly appearance, in particular, made a favourable impression.

"You see that pale Englishman?" whispered the host to his wife.

"I de," replied the lady, in the same low tone, fixing her large dark eyes upon her guest.

"You must engage his attention. To jndge from the melancholy expression of his conntenance, he is either *blase* or unhappy. Try and worm yonrself into his confidence. The task," he added, with a smile, "will not be difficult; most Englishmen are sentimental."

"Another victim!" said the mistress of the mansion, with a sigh. "Have yon so soon forgotten poor Stair and his suicide?"

"Pshaw! He was a boy—a fool—a greenhorn—scarce worth the plucking. You wasted more smiles upon him than wonld have won a dozen riper men. Clara, I believe yon were a little touched in the heart there yourself."

"Heart!" said the woman, bitterly; "do yon mock me? Do you—can you think, after the sacrifice I have made, the crimes I have been dragged into, that I have still a heart? No, Paulo, it has been broken long since."

"So much the better," coarsely answered her better half; "when whole, you must have found it devilish inconvenient. Throw away the soft portions of it, and keep only those which, like mine, are adamant. They will serve onr purpose best now."

"Adamant indeed!" repeated the countess, with a sigh.

At this moment the two strangers approached, to be presented to their hostess, who received them with that quiet dignity which contrasted strangely with the overstrained civility of her husband; though in all probability both were merely assumed to suit a purpose. They both acted, only in a different line.

"Have you been long in Paris?" she demanded, addressing herself more directly to Wilmott, leaving her husband to entertain Faddle, of whose position, with her qnick perception of character, she did not entertain the highest opinion, for there was a tone of vulgarity about him, which neither dress or the friction of society could entirely efface.

"About fonr months," was the reply.

"'Tis strange I shonld not have had the hononr of meeting you before."

"Not in the least," replied Wilmott, "when I tell you that this is my first appearance in Parisian society. I have lived like a hermit in the gayest city in Europe. My friend will tell yon with what difficulty he dragged me from my retreat. Although I must plead," he added, as he observed a slight expression of dissatisfaction on her expressive countenance, "in justification of my churlishness, that I knew not the attractions which society presented, or I shonld have broken my resolution sooner."

The face of the countess became radiant with smiles. A woman must be very unhappy to resist a well turned compliment from a young and handsome man, especially when she has a purpose to gain.

"Yonr time has been passed at the opera?" she observed.

"I have not once visited it."

"Or in the picture galleries?"

"No."

"At home, then?"

"At home."

"Ay, now," said the countess, "I understand you. The way in which you prononnce the word 'home' convinces me that you are happy there—that you have some one to love—a being to suit yonr taste, pleasures, sorrows—bound to yon by the tender confidence and ties of mutual love—the only tie," she added, "which can create happiness."

"I certainly am not alone in Paris," replied Wilmott, blnshing, for he was unused to the energy and freedom of continental women, who, on their first introdnction, set about examining yonr heart with as much freedom as if it belonged to them.

"A mistress?" continued the lady, with a shrug. "It is the way with yon Englishmen."

"Never mind who or what she is," said Wilmott, unwilling, although he scarcely knew why, to confess that he was married. "I did not come here to talk abont her. Besides, fair lady, you forget that I am, like most of my countrymen, a Protestant, and unaccnstomed to a general confessieu."

"Bnt not to particular ones, I venture to assert."

"Perhaps not."

"Come," said the countess, with one of her most fascinating smiles, "I will be your chaperon; give me your arm; let me be the first to introdnce you to Parisian society; you will find it like most human menageries, composed of animals of every character and species, from the tiger to the ape, the elephant to the sloth."

"Yon paint satirically."

"Trnth generally appears like satire to those who have not considered her in all her phases," observed the lady. "We are so much accustomed to take tinsel for gold, that when first we are told the metal is base we call it slander, instead of hailing it as trnth."

"Yon have learnt a terrible lesson in the world," said Wilmott, eyeing her with a feeling of interest, which he could scarcely account for. "I do not envy your instrnctors."

"They have been misery and experience," sighed the lady; "not that vulgar misery which teaches throngh privation and poverty, but the misery of the heart—the solitnde of its affections—the breaking of its hopes—the withering of its feelings. Bnt come," she added, "I promised to annonnce yon, and this is not the way. You will imagine that yon have been introduced to a sentimental girl fresh from her convent, instead of a sedate woman of the world. What shall we converse about?"

"Yonrself," replied Wilmott, gallantly.

"A most interesting subject, truly."

"Bnt one I should never be tired of," urged the gentleman.

"Bnt of which I have long been," replied the conntess; "so no more upon that subject. I know not why I gave way to a weakness not common to me; it is not often that I speak of the past, or of myself—but there is something in some of you Englishmen which invites confidence, or at least frankness."

"You flatter me."

"I never flatter. Why shonld I?"

The fair speaker threw herself upon a couch in an alcove at the end of the principal saloon, and

motioned to her companion to take a seat beside her.

"Do you know that lady?" she whispered, glancing at the same time to a proud, beautiful-looking, dark woman of about thirty, who slightly bent her head as she passed where they were sitting.

"No, but I should not judge her to be happy."

"Nor is she; and yet she is both rich and noble. Her father was one of the Italian nobles who solicited Napoleon to accept the iron crown of Lombardy; he afterwards married a Frenchwoman, sold all his possessions on the other side of the Alps, and purchased estates in France. Would to Heaven," she added, "that others had been equally provident! Madame was his only child and heiress."

"Surely her wealth did not make her unhappy?"

"Indeed but it did; it tempted a handsome young creole, of noble family, to marry her. He was without fortune, she immensely rich. To say that she loved him will ill express the violence of her passion: it was idolatry—madness. With the improvidence so common to his race, he squandered her wealth. She smiled. Land after land, chateau, park, farms, were sold to supply his extravagance. She was never more happy in the devotion of her heart than when sacrificing her fortune for him, till she found that her wealth had only served to enable him to purchase the favours of another."

"And then?" demanded Wilmott.

"Then," said the countess, "she avenged herself; her Italian blood did not belie its origin. The morning after his infidelity was discovered, he was found murdered in his bed."

"Murdered! by whom?"

"Who dare say, since the distraction of his widow was terrible? For two years she never saw society; and such has been her fidelity to the first love of her heart, that she has refused several of the most brilliant offers in France, for by the death of her mother's family she is once more enormously rich; it is even said that she has kept the body of her faithless husband embalmed in one of the saloons of her magnificent hotel, and visits it daily."

"And yet she murdered——"

"Fie! fie!" said the countess, playfully, placing her hands before his lips, "we must not scandalise her."

"Who else could have done it?"

"Who knows? she has never been accused; and it is certain that she loved him too well for her own happiness," continued the fair speaker; "such love, although it never turns to hate, is capable of more than hatred would attempt. I myself," she added, with a quiet smile, "if once I loved, could as easily be wrought to destroy the object of my passion, as to pluck a flower which pleased me; but never to hate him; oh! never, never!"

"Upon my honour," said Wilmott, "should I have the pleasure of the count's intimacy, I shall feel it my duty to put him on his guard."

"No danger; I shall never be jealous of the count."

"Ergo, you do not love him."

"Or have too much confidence in him," retorted the lady; "but come, let us change the theme; yours is true English gallantry to entertain a lady by talking of her husband."

"Who is that lady?" demanded the young Englishman, as an old woman, leaning on the arm of a very beautiful girl, passed.

"You are fortunate," said his companion; "she is one who rarely visits. Indeed, it must be owing to some strange caprice that she is here to-night. That lady is no other than Madame de Genlis."

"The authoress?"

"Ay, of more than books. She made Louis Philippe the man of iron nerve he is—made him aspire to and win a crown; she was at the same time his and his father's mistress, as well as the *gouvernante* of Madame Adelaide."

"Mistress, and yet received in society!" observed Wilmott, whose English notions were shocked, for he could not understand that celebrity was an excuse for crime.

"Oh, those are your insular ideas," said his companion. "Besides, it was a long time ago, and the high rank of the parties makes it overlooked. It is only poor undistinguished persons like myself who are compelled to play propriety. The world, which is so indulgent to Madame de Genlis, would be pitiless to me."

"Humph!" thought Wilmott to himself, "an ingenious way of telling me that I am to consider her as chaste, whatever I may think of her visitors."

The hours flew rapidly by, enlivened by the brilliant conversation of his hostess, whose humour changed, by turns, from grave to gay, from witty to severe, as the motley throng of guests passed in review before them. Without knowing why, her companion was fascinated. More beautiful women he had frequently seen and possessed, but certainly none who in so short a time had made an equal impression.

"You are in luck, Dick," whispered Faddle, as they took their seats at the supper table.

"How so?"

"The countess has taken a fancy to you."

"Pshaw! more likely to you."

"Why, to confess the truth, that would not have astonished me so much," replied the libertine, whose late success in his amours had rendered him more than usually conceited; "but this time I tell you it is you. I watched you on the couch in the alcove; I could read passion in every glance of her dark eyes."

"I am sorry for it."

"Why sorry?" demanded his companion.

"Because I have no heart to give—no, not half a one—crime has seared it. Besides, am I not married?"

"What the devil does she care about that?"

"Then Rose."

"Pooh! Rose never mixes in society; she will never hear of it, and if she does, how easy to persuade her the report is nothing but scandal! Courage, man; an affair of the heart will amuse you."

"Amuse me!" repeated Wilmott, with a look whose reproach showed how deeply he felt the crimes and misery of the past; "I am past amusement, Frank."

"Well then," said his destroyer, "occupy your mind, which broods over that which is past recal. By Jupiter, I almost doubt if you are a man! Pleasure beckons you and you turn aside, more like a hermit than warm flesh and blood. Beauty invites you and you fly from it. You will never be yourself again till you plunge into the purposes of life."

"I shall never be myself again."

"Pshaw! you are a fool."

"And you a philosopher."

It was not till after supper that a saloon was opened for play, and even then more as an adjunct to the

amusement of the evening than the purpose of the meeting. No one was pressed to join the tables—all appeared open and fair.

Wilmott resisted as long as he was able, till he saw Faddle high in the excitement of the game, with a pile of gold and bank-notes before him; then his resolution gave way, and his old thirst, tho stronger for having been so long repressed, returned with redoubled force upon him.

"What," said the countess, who was standing by to observe the game; "do you play?"

"Sometimes; and you?"

"Never. I fear the excitement."

"And I court it."

"Play on red, then," she whispered; "I have a presentiment that you will win."

Their eyes met, and in an instant they understood each other.

At a late hour in the morning the company separated. Faddle, who had been a considerable gainer at first, gradually saw his cash diminish, and rose rom the table minus a hundred pounds. Wilmott, on the contrary, was a winner of two—half of which he gallantly pressed upon his hostess, insisting upon their having been partners on the occasion. The lady rejected it with something like scorn, observing that as she had risked nothing she could not consent to partake his good fortune.

"May I not see you again?" he whispered.

"The house is always open to our friends," was the calm reply.

At this moment the count, with a smiling face, came up and bade the two friends good night. No sooner were their backs turned—for they were the last of his visitors—than the expression of his countenance suddenly changed, and he looked like a fiend.

"Damn them, they have won!" he exclaimed.

"Not both," replied the lady; "the fair one has lost a hundred pounds."

"Ay, and the dark one won two. Did you observe how invariably he staked upon red, as if some devil had whispered him the secret?"

"It was singular, but I have no time to speculate upon him or his game now. I am tired, Paulo," she added; "good night!"

"Good night!" said her husband, with a scowl, as she left the room. Then added, after pacing the room for a minute or two: "Were I but sure that she had played me false, I'd send her to sleep by the side of the boy she loved so well. But no, no—I wrong her. She may hate me, but she is not treacherous."

Paulo's suspicions were not unfounded, though what could have induced his wife to urge Wilmott to play upon red our readers have yet to learn—certainly it was not love.

At as early an hour as etiquette permitted, Wilmott waited upon his fair hostess on the following morning and presented the customary bouquet. The lady received him in her dressing-room, which was furnished with that luxurious taste in which the Parisian ladies excel. Pictures by Iskey and Watteau hung from the damask-covered walls; vases of Sevres or oriental china, filled with rich flowers, were placed upon stands round the apartment, which had more the air of a sultana's bower than a modern fine lady's retreat. The countess was attired in a becoming morning dress, which displayed the voluptuous contour of her fine person to perfection. Every movement could be distinctly traced through its thin folds, and her visitor thought he had never gazed upon a countenance more expressive or more beautiful.

> Her face was of Italia's mould,
> Such as her daughters bore of old.
> A classic head, whose raven hair
> Hung on a brow like marble fair;
> A chiseled nostril—a rich lip
> Sweet as the dew the wild bees sip.

"You are very lovely!" was the involuntary exclamation which burst from him as he presented his flowers.

"I was once," she calmly replied, "till sorrow blighted me."

"And are still."

There was a pause, during which the lady appeared to be revolving something in her mind. Her visitor flattered himself that she only awaited his declaration to declare that his passion was returned. How little did he suspect the volcano which raged beneath that breast of snow! He was maddened with excitement, and in the fever of his blood caught her hand and fervently pressed it to his lips.

"No folly, sir!" she exclaimed. "If our friendship is to continue, it is time we understood each other. Be seated, and listen to me. It will save some embarrassment to both of us."

"Well," thought her visitor to himself, "this is the most philosophical way of arranging a declaration I ever met with, but perhaps it is the custom of Italy; if so, it saves a lover a vast deal of trouble."

Taking the seat nearest to the couch upon which she was seated, and to which the lady pointed in a business-like manner, he waited for her to commence the conversation. He had not long to wait. Taking a note from her bosom, she opened it, and during their interview kept occasionally glancing at its contents.

"Your name is really Richard Wilmott?" she began.

"Really."

"Formerly a merchant in London; but compelled to fly, having dissipated a noble fortune, and made an imprudent marriage."

"And which marriage I have lived," eagerly interrupted her visitor, "bitterly to regret. It was passion—madness—infatuation—ruin."

"I doubt not your regret," said the lady, a proud and scornful smile playing for an instant upon her lips; "you would not have been a man had you regretted the sacrifice of your position to purchase the love of innocence and virtue. What was the value of a pure and virgin heart, truthful affection, beauty and love, to compare with gold—the only idol to which those of your sex ever remain constant?"

"You wrong us."

"I know you."

It struck Wilmott that this was the oddest style of declaration he had ever witnessed; but as he did not exactly know how to reply, he chose the wisest part, and was silent.

"You are poor?" resumed the lady.

"Why, I am certainly not so rich as formerly; but I have still some fortune left, and——"

"Pshaw!" interrupted the countess; "you will not understand me. It is not your money that I want; I loathe gold as much as you adore it; more, I will make you rich on one condition."

"What condition would be too dear if it purchased me the happiness of——"

Here the hearty but scornful laugh of the mistress

of the mansion cut short his speech. He was puzzled. There was in her manner something different from any thing he had ever encountered before. He could not understand her.

"I would have spared your vanity this rebuke," she exclaimed, "but you will force me. Know then that the only thing which can render our intercourse less than hateful to me is your never mentioning the word love again. Love!" she repeated; "earthworm! what can he know of the passion who regrets the sacrifice of dross to the object of his choice? I have sacrificed—but no matter, I wish not to speak of myself."

"The count is a happy man, lady," faltered the bewildered suitor.

"He is a miserable wretch, whom I hate as only an outraged woman can hate. I would beggar him—see him rot—die—starve—stifle the last prayer on his accursed lips! God!" she added, "I should be miserable if I thought that even thy mercy could save him."

"Your husband!"

"He is not my husband."

"Cool, at least," thought her visitor.

"Nor my paramour," she added proudly; "but he holds a secret which chains me—makes me the accomplice of his villanies, but not the slave of his passions. Never has the threshold of my chamber been passed by him."

"And yet the world believes——"

"Any thing it is taught," interrupted the lady; "but it is necessary for my project that you should understand me. My youth was passed in the sunny city of Florence. At the age of sixteen I left my convent to espouse my cousin. To say I loved him would ill express the feelings of my young heart. It was idolatry—worship!"

"And he?" demanded Wilmott.

"Loved another. The arrangement was a family one; for I was rich in that which all men love—in lands and wealth,—and he was poor. Not a month had passed after our ill-assorted union before I perceived a marked coldness in his manner. He was frequently absent from me for days together; and when he did return, his air was dissatisfied—he seemed uneasy at my presence. Love, they say, is short-sighted. It was with agony that I perceived the change. With gold at my command, I surrounded him with spies, and found that his hours of absence were passed at a cottage on the banks of the Arno, where, in the embraces of a peasant girl—a thing of clay, a being without soul or energy—he forgot the bride he had vowed to love and honour—the creature whose existence was entwined with his! I cannot paint the change which came over the dream of my young life when first convinced of his infidelity. From a timid girl I became a resolute woman. Tears, remonstrances, and entreaties were tried in vain. From the moment I found it impossible to win him back, I resolved upon revenge; and when an Italian forms her resolution, the deed is half accomplished."

"Revenge!" repeated her visitor.

"What else was left me?" interrupted the countess. "In the neighbourhood of Florence was a man long suspected as being the chief of a daring band of miscreants. I found him out, and boldly declared my purpose. Gold was not wanting; that I found with a lavish hand; and my burning thirst was satisfied at last."

"How satisfied?"

"The cottage of his paramour was wrapt in flames; doors and windows were well secured; he perished, miserably perished, in her arms, whose wanton caresses he had preferred to mine. I stood by and looked on—heard their despairing cries—and yet my resolution never once failed me; they were music to my ears. Long ere succour could arrive I trampled on their ashes."

"Your revenge indeed was fearful!"

"Not more so than my injuries," she resumed. "But I was betrayed; a villain of the band, dissatisfied with his share in the large price I paid, denounced me and the leader of the troop. Orders were issued by the grand duke for my arrest. I was mad—mad with grief and terror. Furnished with a few jewels and what money I could collect, I left Italy with the instrument of my crimes for ever—became the accomplice of a miscreant in his schemes of plunder on the unwary, but never his mistress! Oh! never, never!"

"And that instrument, doubtless, was Paulo—the count, as he calls himself?"

"Right. The bond which united us was of hate, not love. I was necessary to his schemes as he had been to my vengeance. After years of misery and degradation, I once more found that I had a heart to love. A young Englishman was lured here. I thought to win him by gifts and kindness, and at last was happy. God, how happy!"

"You mean Henry Stair? I have heard a whisper of your passion."

"Paulo perceived it, and with devilish art—for he still cherishes the hope of one day calling me his—contrived to ruin him. The boy loved me devotedly, madly loved me! His destroyer told him all the tale of my dishonour and my crime; the next morning he was a suicide, and I a wretch for life, hopeless, withered at the heart! Do you wonder that I hate the man who taught his soul to scorn me?"

"No."

"Or that I seek revenge?"

"Still less."

"Hear then my project. Paulo is at the head of a gang of sharpers. His object is to fly to the New World as soon as he has sufficiently plundered his dupes in Europe; and he has threatened to denounce me unless I consent to accompany him. His flight must be prevented."

"How?"

"By reducing him to poverty, depriving him of his ill gotten gold, the idol of his worthless nature. For the future we must appear as little intimate as possible. Frequent our assemblies, and whenever you see me stand behind the chair of his partner Marotto, play upon rouge; if behind Paulo's, noir. Play high. If you lack gold I will supply you with the means; for I am still, although he knows it not, rich, fearfully rich. Break his bank, ruin him, crush the viper, and in a second fortune gratify my hate and retrieve your past folly. Is it a compact?"

"I were a fool to refuse it," said Wilmott, whose feelings of love, or rather passion, were cooled by the fearful tale to which he had been listening. "But will not my continued success create suspicion? The count, if I mistake not, is a cool hand."

"Fear not, I know him well; he is so devoted to his hellish trade, that he would risk his soul rather than give it up. While a marvedi remains he will play on. His fortune is already much reduced, for Fortune lately has betrayed him. When he is

beggared in wealth as in honour, I can defy him. Play your game boldly," she added, "and success is certain."

"I will," exclaimed Wilmott, "in the hope that my success may win me an interest in your heart. Love shall minister to vengeance! And dared I only hope that——"

"Hope nothing," interrupted the lady, with a haughty frown, "but what I have given. Not even for vengeance, the last desire of my heart, would I descend to sell myself. Seek thy recompense in the gain. Gold to your sex will replace honour—love. Embrace your idol, and be satisfied. But remember this theme must be urged no more."

The offer was too tempting not to be unhesitatingly accepted, as it promised a secure and easy way of redeeming the past ruin of his fortune. From the manner of the fair speaker, and the undisguised contempt with which she treated his protestations, he saw that all further solicitations would be useless. With her temperament he wondered why she had not sought an easier way of vengeance; he knew not that Paulo had bound her by a solemn oath never to attempt any thing against his life, and that, with the superstition common to her countrywomen, the countess, who had not paused, when her passions were excited, at the crime of murder, shrank at the idea of perjury. Perhaps, too, in the intensity of her hatred, she considered that poverty to a man like Paulo would be a punishment a thousandfold more terrible than death. There was a refinement even in her hate.

"Remember," she said, as soon as the arrangement was understood between them, "that you must not whisper our compact even to yourself. Betray me, and I shall find a means to reach you."

"I know," replied Wilmott, "that you have strange means at your command. How else could you have arrived at the knowledge you possess of my past life? But I suppose my old tempter, Captain Faddle, betrayed me to you."

"Mean you the man who accompanied you here last night?"

"The same."

"The last man in the world whom I would trust. Villain is written in every feature of his handsome but vulgar countenance. He is incapable either of friendship or confidence. Love, with him, is a brutal passion, not a sentiment. You," she added, "although sadly changed, have been capable of all. If I err not, that man has been your ruin."

"He has."

"Keep your secret from him, or he will betray you. I hate unnecessary mystery. My information was derived from a better source—the minister of police."

Wilmott turned pale as death; for the idea suddenly struck him that, if that redoubtable officer was so well informed of his past life, he might also have obtained a knowledge of the crime for which the unfortunate Hawk had suffered; or that an application had been made for his extradition by the English government. He little knew that the peculiar system of police in France, where every tenth person you meet in society is most probably a spy, places extensive information in the hands of the minister whose duty it is to learn the antecedents of all who arrive in Paris. Once satisfied that they have no political object in view, and possess the means of existence, they are left to pursue their pleasures or objects without interference.

"God!" said the countess, starting from the sofa, "was it a worse crime than poverty which drove you from your native country? You look——"

"How do I look?" faltered the still agitated Wilmott.

"Even as I looked the night which gratified my thirst of blood—like a murderer."

"Murderer!" he repeated.

"Enough; your secret is safe with me. It is an additional bond between us. Now, then, away, and remember that your morning visit here must never be repeated; it might excite suspicion; for he we have to deal with, to the ferocity of the tiger, possesses the cunning of the fox. If circumstances ever require that you should see me, wear in your button-hole a white camelia; I shall understand it."

"But how," demanded Wilmott, "am I to know where to meet you?"

"In the private cabinet of the chief of the police. You start, and are surprised that, a fugitive from Justice myself, I should appoint a rendezvous in her very sanctuary. But I will explain it. The minister depends on me for information which he can obtain through no other channel. As long as I can supply him I am safe."

"And then?"

"He would sacrifice me as heartlessly as he has done a hundred others. Away!" she added. "Your visit has lasted long enough. To avoid suspicion it must not be repeated. Remember my instructions—play high—contrive to lose occasionally, to blind them to their ruin. Do you require gold?"

"No," said her visitor, upon whom the conversation had made a strange impression.

"And, above all," resumed the countess, "not a word to your friend—he would sell you like a cur. If he has duped you, play against him. Fortune once more smiles upon you—it offers you the two gifts dearest to the human heart."

"And what are they?" demanded Wilmott, curiously.

"Wealth and revenge."

Her visitor had just risen to take his departure, when a gentle tap at the door startled them both.

"Remain," whispered the countess, "and appear unconcerned. It is Paulo. Come in."

The door opened, and the Count de Villa entered. Although unprepared at meeting the Englishman in the boudoir of his espoused wife, he was too much of a man of the world to express it even by a look. The lady was equally unconcerned.

"Pardon, ma belle!" he affectedly exclaimed. "I knew not that you had a visitor."

"Oh, you may come in," said the countess, carelessly. "Monsieur Wilmott has tired me with his compliments; he is like the rest of the world, and thinks that women exist on no other food than flattery. But he is young—he will learn to know them better in time. See," she added, "what pretty flowers he has brought me."

"Exquisite!" said the count, taking up the bouquet. "To judge by the arrangement, as if there had been a billet concealed within the leaves."

To his great relief he found that it was just as it left the hands of the florist. The lady smiled. She understood his motive.

"Shall we see you this evening?" demanded the master of the house.

"Certainly, if madame will permit me to pay my respects to her," said the visitor. "Besides, I owe

you your revenge. I was a considerable winner last night."

"Pshaw! a mere trifle!"

"I was astonished at my good fortune," resumed Wilmott. "I am generally so unlucky."

"Then pursue the fickle goddess," observed Paulo, "while her favours last; she is a mistress who requires constant wooing, or her smiles soon change to frowns."

"And that," chimed in the countess, "may be the reason why men remain true to her. The love which is lightly won is in general as lightly prized; difficulty seems necessary to secure constancy in your fickle sex."

"And what," demanded the count, "will secure it in yours?"

"Respect," replied the lady, haughtily; "no woman of mind ever loves where she despises. But really, Monsieur Wilmott must excuse me: it is time that I should dress. Adieu."

The gentleman took the hint, made his bow, and departed. No sooner had he left the room than the manner of the pretended count entirely changed; his complacent smiles were altered to a scowl of jealousy and hate.

"You love that fellow, madame?" he observed.

"With about as much passion as I do you," coolly replied the countess. "Love! no, Paulo, no; that dream is ended for ever. I have been wakened from it too rudely ever to dream again."

"So you said after the death of——"

"Name him not!" she exclaimed, starting from her seat, "unless you wish to drive me mad. Leave me! Am I ever to be tortured with these insulting, degrading suspicions?"

"I overheard your confidence with the Englishman," added the count.

"I hope it amused you then," she replied carelessly, "for it is much more than it did me. Do you wish to drive me mad with this folly? Confidence! what confidence, except of crime, have I to give him who commanded me to attract his attention, and, if possible, to obtain an interest in his heart? you! to lead him to the gaming-table? you! and now, when, like a slave, I have done your bidding, you turn round with your ridiculous suspicions! I am tired of them."

"Forgive me!" he said, perfectly reassured by her manner, for he had not really overheard a syllable, which the countess well knew; "were you but once my wife, I should cease to be jealous."

"Doubtless."

"And will you never reward my long-enduring constancy and passion—my services."

"I have rewarded them," said the lady, promptly; "I have linked my fortunes with yours—it will be your own fault if ever they are separated. Mean, ignoble, treacherous, and cruel, as I know your nature to be, I have consented to pass in the eyes of the world as your wife, or mistress. The debt is paid. There is a pitch of degradation to which I cannot descend."

"You forget," observed the rascal, "that my evidence can send you to the scaffold?"

"Not unless *you share it with me*," retorted the countess, now fully roused from her usual apathetic manner. "Fulfil your threat—denounce me. I am weary of life and its humiliations. Repeat but one word of menace to me again, and I seek the cabinet of Delessert—confess all. He will be glad to learn that the man whose forgeries shook the faith of the public in the Bank of France is still in Paris."

The count trembled at the name of the prefect of police—trembled lest any servant in the antechamber should have heard the fearful words. He knew that if it came to a crisis his accomplice possessed ten times more courage than he did, and that in a moment of excitement she was perfectly capable of denouncing both him and herself to justice; he therefore judged it best to soothe her.

"Come!" he exclaimed, "let us be friends. Forgive this; the unfortunate passion makes me mad—unjust."

"More," added the lady; "it makes you a fool as well as villain."

"I am jealous."

"Of a man whom you requested me to flatter and lead to his ruin. But I have done with him; from this time forth I am a stranger to him."

"Are you serious?" he demanded.

"You ought to know that I seldom change my resolution," replied the lady; "it has been kept on a more important point than this. Paulo, I never yet deceived you with respect to my feelings. Did I love this stranger, it is not the fear of your resentment that would make me pause. For the last time I warn you, provoke me not beyond the power of endurance—I forgive not twice."

With this caution they separated; the lady to her toilette, the gentleman to make arrangements for the evening assembly, during which he trusted to plunder the man he hated. But for the compact between the countess and Wilmott he would have succeeded, but the tables were turned against him.

That same night his destined dupe, following the instructions he had received, played high, and won almost every turn of the game. The count was furious, and Faddle, who witnessed the success of his victim with ill-concealed envy, enraged beyond description, urged on by his evil destiny, staked large sums and lost every thing.

So cold was the manner of the lady, so studied her avoidance of Wilmott, that even Paulo's jealous nature was satisfied, the least suspicion vanished, and although he felt heated and vexed at his success, still, as his losses were compensated in part by his winnings from Faddle and the rest, he bore them patiently, not doubting but that Fortune would turn her back at last upon the man whom she now appeared to smile upon.

"I am a winner," said Wilmott to his companion as they left the house together.

"And I a beggar," gloomily replied Faddle, "unless you assist me."

"Did you ever assist me?" demanded his dupe.

"Was it ever in my power?"

"Yes; but I will not reproach you. You found me young, full of confidence in human nature, rich and respected; ask your heart what you have made me."

"I would have made you a man."

"An assassin, you mean."

"A truce with this," said the hardened villain; "I need no mock repentance; your good fortune swells you with confidence; it may not always last; farewell."

"Nay, you leave me not so; here are five thousand francs; take them from the man you have systematically plundered and degraded; they may help, if not to mend your broken fortunes, at least to keep you from starvation."

"I shall never fear that while there are fools in the world."

"True, you once told me they were your bankers, and that you drew cheques upon their credulity."

Despite the humiliation which he experienced, Faddle took the money, and wishing his companion "good night," hastened to a neighbouring hell in the Palais Royal, where he played desperately, and once more lost every thing. Excited by his ill-fortune, and hopeless for the future, he made the best of his way from the spot where he had been plundered, and strode like a madman till he passed the Arch of Triumph, and reached the high road, where he paused to recal his scattered senses to his aid.

"Cursed city," he exclaimed, "where I thought to retrieve my losses, and have completed my ruin! Fool that I was, to think that even I, with all my experience in the world's cunning, could match thy polished vice—thy systematic chicanery! Oh, could I breathe a curse upon dens of infamy that should destroy thee, instantly would I be avenged, even though I perished with thee! I begin to be tired of life, and almost wish the last card were played and the deal ended. Courage!" he added, "courage! I was not born to die like a dog thus—despairing and miserable! I have still some diamonds left; Lisette, too, has trinkets. My credit is untouched. Coinage I have not lost yet."

With these words he roused himself, and retraced his way to Paris, pondering, as he did so, on the means and chance of once more retrieving himself. The keenest pang he endured was envy at Wilmott's success; and he determined, if possible, to see Rose, and poison her ears with the tale of her husband's intimacy with the celebrated Countess de Villa.

"What trinkets and money have you, Lisette?" he demanded of his mistress, at a late hour the following morning, as they were seated at breakfast. "I have been out of luck to-night, and have run short, till I obtain a remittance from England."

The poor girl, without a word, hastened to her chamber, and returned with her little treasure, and placed it in his hands.

"Is this all?"

"All," she replied. "Do you think I could keep any thing from you?"

These simple words revealed how deep was the feeling which the worthless scoundrel had created in her woman's heart. With her, to love was to surrender every tie of prudence, every thought of self, to the object of her passion.

"They shall be restored to you in a few days," he whispered.

"And if they are not, I shall not regret them, so I see you happy. Ah! Frank," she added—for she had learned to address him by his Christian name—"with common care, how happy we might have been! We had, or rather you had, enough for simple content."

"I was not born for such a life," he replied. "I must have excitement; I live best in that; I revel in it. A palace in a solitude would be a hermit's cave to me."

"And to me a paradise, if you were with me. Perhaps," she continued, "you would love me then."

"Do I not now?"

"Perhaps."

"I tell you that I do," said the scamp, touched by her devotion; "but not even love would satisfy me. I must have the means of pleasure as well. In a few days you shall see me rich again."

"So I see you kind and happy, Frank, I ask no more. My world is your affection. Deprive me of that, and all the rest would be a desert."

Full of his determination of seeing Rose, Faddle hastily made his toilette, and started out. His first expedition was to the Jew's, where he disposed of his few remaining gems and the trinkets of poor Lisette. The sum they fetched amounted to three thousand francs, or one hundred and twenty pounds. It was not without difficulty that he obtained admission to the object of his former pursuit. Rose twice refused to receive him, and it was only on the assurance of the domestic that the gentleman had declared he came to communicate something concerning her happiness that her fears induced her to see him. Wilmott's ravings and unquiet dreams previous to their leaving England had filled her mind with strange suspicions, and terror mastered her disgust. For her boy's sake she felt it her duty, if possible, to preserve his father. After repeatedly desiring the domestic, who spoke no other language than her own, not to quit the room, her visitor was at last admitted. He noted with an inward pang the shudder of disgust which ran like an electric shock through her frame, when she beheld him.

"My visit, I find, is distasteful to you, madame."

"It is," she mildly replied; "and yet I have consented, for my husband's sake, to see you."

"And does your servant remain during our interview?" he coarsely demanded.

"Most certainly. But you can speak your errand freely; she cannot understand us."

"And if she could it would, I dare say, inform her but little; for I see the wench is pretty, and I know Dick's failing—he no longer loves you."

"That I know," replied Rose calmly; "your malice falls hurtless there."

"He is engaged in an intrigue with an artful woman, a certain Countess de Villa."

"Liar!" exclaimed a deep voice near him.

He started, and beheld, to his confusion, Wilmott, who had unexpectedly returned and overheard him. For a moment they stood casting looks of deadly hatred upon each other. Both felt that it was no longer necessary to wear a mask. Wilmott was the first to speak.

"Is this your friendship?"

"You see it is," replied Faddle, coolly.

"Serpent! from this hour I cast you off," continued the incensed dupe of his villanies. "Rich, I supported you with my purse and influence; poor, I shared with you the little gleam of sunshine that remained. And how have you repaid me? By slandering me to my wife. Rose," he added, "look on me; I can bear your gaze. It is true I know the Countess de Villa; and it is as true that there is no dream or thought of love between us. Her heart has been too scathed, even if mine were free. Do you believe me?"

"I do," replied Rose, joyfully; for she felt relieved in seeing her husband at last throw off the yoke of his false friend.

"Beware," said Faddle, with a scowling glance. "You know that I am never braved with impunity."

"Richard," exclaimed Rose, pale with terror, "are you in the power of that man?"

"In his power?" repeated her husband. "No; vile as he is, he dares not assert that, by any act of mine,

I have placed myself in his power. Our crimes, like our follies, have been mutual. Our guarantee is mutual, and so would be our punishment. Leave my house," he added; "leave the man you have plundered and would have dishonoured, and take with you my scorn and defiance."

With a countenance in which rage and malice were depicted, the baffled libertine turned upon his heel and left the room, vowing secretly to be revenged for the insult he had received.

"Thank Heaven he is gone," said Rose. "Would you had never known him!"

"Amen!" repeated her husband, "with all my heart! Rose," he added, kindly taking her by the hand, "I know that I am unworthy of your love—that I have blighted your young existence. But in this instance you have nothing to reproach me. By heavens! I swear there is no more of love between me and the Countess de Villa than you and the villain who has just left us."

"I know it."

"You know it!" repeated Wilmott, in astonishment.

"I have seen the countess; she has called here twice, and told me her melancholy story. A nature like hers is too proud and passionate to dissemble. Whatever the service she requires or the mystery between you, I feel persuaded that it is not love. My only fear is that it should prove ——"

"What?"

"Vengeance! Oh, Richard! Richard! stain not your hands with blood!"

"Blood!" said her conscience-stricken husband, over whom the recollection of the young stranger, so cruelly murdered by himself and Faddle, came with a sickening force.

"Think," she added, "on the restless days, the sleepless nights, the hideous dreams which haunt the murderer's pillow. Poverty is bad enough; but it is contentment, happiness, if borne with a clear conscience. Folly may be forgiven or atoned; bloodshed, never."

"I know, I feel it!" exclaimed Wilmott, gazing on her wildly. "There is a hell in conscience which no prayers can quiet, no change of scene extinguish. For heaven's sake, speak of it no more!"

Alarmed at the dreadful agitation into which her words had thrown her husband, Rose, who, from his uneasy manner and restless nights, had long entertained vague impressions, felt them suddenly confirmed, and she shuddered to think that the father of her child might turn out an assassin. Had she known the truth in all its fearful details, her apprehensions could not have been greater.

"Heaven have mercy on us!" she involuntarily exclaimed. "When will my cup of bitterness be full?"

"It is nearly drained," said her husband, taking her by the hand, and pretending not to observe that she shuddered at his touch. "I shall soon possess the means of quitting Europe for ever. In America, far from the haunts of man, we may find that peace denied us here—more, hope again for happiness."

"Happiness!" she repeated, with a sigh.

"Well, then, content. My fortunes, Rose, are once more on the rise. I hate Europe and its refinements, its hollow friendships, its living lies, its prostituted energies. Better to live apart from man than be the victim of his treacheries—better rear our children in the ignorance of innocence than the learning of civilisation and of crime."

"Ah, Richard! if I thought this penitence was real—that this resolution would but last—the hope would heal many a wound—chase away many a sad regret."

"It will, by Heaven!"

"And I," said his wife, "will support thee in the struggle. Patience and resignation shall be my dower; I had no other to bring with me," she added, with a smile.

After this explanation between the ill-assorted pair, a better understanding seemed to exist between them, for hope pointed to a future.

Wilmott encountered Faddle at De Vila's every evening, but, constant to his resolution, treated him as a perfect stranger. The bad heart of the libertine was gratified at the coldness, amounting to disdain, with which the countess treated him. Indeed, so well acted was the feeling, that Paulo more than once remonstrated with her upon the subject.

"You absolutely seem to hate the Englishman," he observed; "this is folly."

"You have no great cause to love him," was the reply; "his continued success has nearly broken the bank. Had I been friends with him, what might you not have suspected in your jealous fury!"

"Curse him!" muttered the count, between his teeth; "ten thousand francs last night! Should it continue," he added in a whisper, "you must lend me your diamonds for a few days, to raise supplies upon."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," replied the lady, coldly. "What is your ruin or success to me? If I partake not the latter, you have no right to involve me in the former."

"Beware!" whispered the ruffian.

"And I bid you beware!" said the countess, meeting his gaze with a proud look of defiance. "You think I fear you; I did once—but not now. Your wealth is gone, or soon will be; for, despite my warning voice, you will court ruin to the last. The serpent's tooth is drawn, its venom powerless; our compact will soon be ended."

"Never, but with life!"

"Perhaps not," she continued; "and if by the sacrifice of mine, I care not how soon, for I am weary of it. The prefect of police told me, this evening, that the minister of Tuscany had been making inquiries after you."

"After me?" said Paulo, turning deadly pale.

"Fear not," she said; "I am too useful to him yet to be lightly given up. Whilst I am necessary to the government of Louis Philippe you are safe. But away," she added; "the tables are filling; go you to your task, and leave me to the fulfilment of mine; both are hateful and degrading."

"Tasks!"

"Ay; you to plunder or be plundered; I to trip the unwary confidence of youth, or flatter the vanity of age, but to betray them both. How many a patriot's hope and statesman's scheme have been destroyed by the treachery of woman! We avenge through the weakness of your sex the wrongs inflicted by its strength."

Italy, at the period of which we write, was the seat of the intrigues which soon after shook Europe to its centre. The lodges of the Illuminats and Young Italy were the laboratories whence issued the revolution which the tyranny of Louis Philippe and the despotism of Austria had so long provoked. The countess, from her influence with her countrymen and her address, wormed herself into their secrets, which, to do her justice, she only partially betrayed, revealing enough to alarm the weak government of France, but not to compromise the personal safety of those who trusted her; hence her influence with Gabriel Delessert, the minister of police, who did not disdain to consult her upon every point touching the threatened movement in Italy.

So deep was the hatred which the countess bore to her confederate, the unworthy Paulo, that she beheld with a fiend-like exultation the losses which, night after night, reduced his ill-gotten gains. Quarrels between him and his partner in the bank were of daily, nay, hourly occurrence, and to sustain his sinking credit he was obliged to part with his plate, and would have sacrificed her diamonds for the same purpose, had she not placed them beyond his reach.

"I cannot understand it," said Paulo, one morning after a violent quarrel with his partner; "four hundred thousand francs has this accursed Englishman won; nothing that I have ever seen equals his success. Curse the fellow! he plays fairly too; I have watched him as narrowly as a tiger does its prey, and not a sleight-of-hand movement can I detect."

"But does he never lose?" demanded the countess, with a quiet smile.

"Yes; but only when he seems tired of winning, and stakes a few paltry hundreds in lieu of thousands. I'd give half my life to know his secret. I would break the principal tables of Germany and France with it."

"Perhaps."

"I tell you I am sure I could. If this night proves as unfortunate as the last, I am a ruined man, unless you consent to lend me your diamonds as a last means to redeem my credit."

"And starve myself, I suppose? Never."

"Our mutual safety demands it."

"Say rather yours. Was it my fault," demanded the countess, "that you set up this fool's trap, into which you have fallen yourself? No; I warned you from the first."

"You did," said Paulo, gloomily.

"But I might just as well have preached to the

winds or waves," resumed the countess. "You saw your fate, and courted it. The fault has been your own. Blame no one else for it."

"But you, at least, must share my ruin. I am not the man to fall alone," exclaimed the ruffian, ferociously.

"Perhaps not," said the countess.

"I am sure not," added Paulo.

That very night the saloons of the Count de Villa were brilliantly lighted and more crowded than usual. The guests observed an unusual number of attendants; and one, a cold stealthy-looking personage, seemed to have taken an absolute command over the rest. He was the tradesman who had so long supplied the extravagant banquets nightly set before the guests. The creditors of the Count de Villa were at last tired of waiting for their money. They had been fed with promises and put off, till they would neither wait nor be fed with promises any longer, and the unusual attendants which the visitors remarked were officers put in possession by the creditors, who, at Paulo's entreaties, had resolved to risk one night more, in the hope that his ill-fortune would turn, and that he would be enabled to pay at least a part of the demands made upon him.

"You persist in keeping your diamonds, then?" whispered the count as he saw his supposed countess enter the saloon, elegantly dressed, but without a jewel of any kind upon her person.

"I do."

"And you will suffer the seizure to be made if the bank fails?"

"I will."

"By God, then, madame, if it is made I will denounce you by your real name and title. If I go to prison you shall share it with me."

"You dare not!" replied the fair Italian, haughtily. "You have not the courage to brave the scaffold with me, for the ungenerous are always cowards. You tremble at the fear of death, and in the ignominy of your nature would prefer the galleys—nay, the deepest dungeon at St. Michael—to the peaceful slumber of the grave."

Paulo, overcome by rage at the sarcasm, the truth of which made it doubly severe, seized her by the arm with a brutal grasp, which caused the blood to flush into her usually pale cheek. Her haughty nature was roused at the indignity.

"Release me," she exclaimed, "or I will appeal to the company for protection."

"This way," he muttered, hoarsely, endeavouring at the same time to force her. "This way; to your cabinet. We will settle our dispute there."

"Help!" said the countess, in a loud tone. "Help, if you are men!"

"Silence! On!"

Despite his threat, the indignant woman, now thoroughly roused, repeated her screams. In an instant the folding doors which opened from the room where they were sitting into the grand saloon were flung aside, and a dozen gentlemen, at least, entered the apartment. Paulo relinquished his grasp, and the lady sank half fainting upon an ottoman.

"Heavens, countess, what is the matter?" demanded a young officer of carbineers, who had been one of her hopeless admirers. "What can have happened?"

"Something very terrible," said Paulo, forcing a laugh, and trying to appear unconcerned; "a spider fell from the cornice upon her shoulder while we were sitting together in familiar conversation. Ladies, you know, are subject to nervous attacks. Come, my love," he added, trying to look affectionately at her, "let me conduct you to your boudoir; you will be better there—much better."

"I am better as it is," replied the countess, who had decided upon what steps she should take; "but really the filthy spider has made me so nervous that I feel *safer* with my friends than alone in my dressing-room. But perhaps you will fetch me my eau-de-Cologne—you will find it on the console."

To have refused would have provoked an explanation, which, like most bullies, Paulo feared; and muttering curses upon her presence of mind, which had baffled him, he hastily left the apartment.

"Chevalier," said the lady to the young officer, "give me your arm to the balcony. I shall breathe more freely there, for really the heat of this small room is growing intolerable."

The request of the fair hostess was eagerly complied with, and the envied soldier conducted her to a recess which opened from the apartment with folding glass doors, and was filled with choice flowers. The air seemed to revive her.

"You are better now, countess," he observed, tenderly pressing her hand.

"Hear me," whispered the lady. "You have a manly heart, and, I believe, a generous nature. Will you serve me in the strange position in which I am placed?"

"With my life."

"I have but few moments to confide in you, for De Villa will soon return. Have a carriage ready at midnight on the Boulevards."

"I will."

"And give this tablet"—she took a small ivory one from her bosom—"to the English stranger, Wilmott."

"What!" said the young man, "make me the instrument of another's happiness!—raise my hopes, to crush them so cruelly! This exceeds even the coquetting of woman—there is something fiendlike in it!"

"Do you think me capable of falsehood?" demanded the lady, fixing her dark, lustrous eyes upon him, as though she would read his very soul.

"No."

"Believe me, then, when I swear that I never conversed with Wilmott since his first visit here, and neither expect nor wish to speak with him again."

"Is he not to be the companion of your flight?"

"No."

"Who then?"

"You, on one condition."

"Name it," said the enraptured soldier, "and if human skill or courage can accomplish it, my happiness is assured. I feel that I could brave death a thousand times, but for the prospect of a smile from you. Trust me: a life of devotion shall repay your generous confidence in my faith and honour; not of devotion only, but of love. Name your condition."

A sad expression clouded for a moment the features of the Italian, as she listened to the impassioned declaration of the young man, and felt how bitterly she was doomed to disappoint his hopes; but the crisis she had provoked with Paulo was at hand, and she required his protection.

"Name your condition," he repeated.

"That I direct our route."

"Where you will," whispered the young man, with a glance so full of passion and desire, that it called

the blood into her pale cheek. "Any road will be blest to me with you by my side, so it conducts to happiness."

Further conversation was cut short by the return of the count with the eau-de-Cologne. He found the lady—who, like most of her countrywomen, was a natural actress—just recovering, to all appearance, from a fainting fit. He was fearful that he had gone too far, and endeavoured, by an assumed kindness of manner, to calm her suspicions of his purpose till the guests had departed; then he knew he should have her in his power alone; but while they remained, she might defy him.

"Are you better now, love?" he demanded, in a gentle tone.

"Something, count."

"Shall I order Agatha to assist you? The fatigue of receiving your friends to-night will, I fear, be too much for you."

"No," said the countess, rising at the same time from her seat, "I feel better now—much better; and a promenade through the rooms will amuse me. Count," she added, "when the hostess is indisposed, the host should be the more attentive. Look to your friends. I can claim the arm of the gallant captain," she added, with a glance which the young officer interpreted into a request not to leave her for the evening.

Paulo was mortified and enraged, but compelled to swallow them both in silence, for he knew that the slightest attempt to coerce the lady would provoke the crisis he wished to avoid. Many of the gentlemen who frequented his mansion did so only on account of the countess; him they treated invariably with that quiet civility which in good society amounts to contempt. He felt that she would not lack, if necessary, a dozen champions; and, to use an Italian proverb,

"He gnawed his heart in silence."

Never had the saloons of the Count de Villa been more crowded than on that night. Many foreigners of distinction were present; some in pursuit of pleasure in its most seductive form—woman; others merely to kill time or brave their fortune at the gaming-table.

"Watch your opportunity," whispered the countess, "and give Wilmott the tablet."

Her companion gazed upon her as if he still doubted whether or not she was making an instrument of his passion for her; but she met his look with an air so candid, that his suspicions were at once removed.

"You must have learnt a cruel lesson in the world," she observed.

"Why so?"

"Because you are not naturally of a suspicious disposition at your years; it is unnatural, unless bought by experience of the world's treachery and hollow-heartedness."

"Have you found it such?" he demanded.

"Have I?" she repeated; "not a flower in life's garden but has wounded me with its thorns. I have found a serpent hid beneath each; and if suffering can atone for error, my atonement has been complete."

"Be it mine," said the young man, passionately, "to teach you to forget the past in the happiness of the present. Remember, to youth there is always a future."

With these words, and a tender pressure of the hand, he left her to deliver the tablet confided to his charge to the Englishman, whom, despite the confidence with which he regarded the word of the countess, he began to look upon with suspicion, if not dislike.

"Youth and future!" murmured the Italian, as soon as he had left her; "my youth has long since withered, and my future is the dark cell of penitence and prayer. No weakness," she mentally continued, "no repining! I have lost earth—let my repentance, if possible, win heaven. Poor boy! he little dreams, in his jealousy of the Englishman, how dead my heart is to every pulse of love—that it beats alone for vengeance."

Wilmott was astonished at being touched on the arm by an officer of dragoons with whom he had no acquaintance, just as he was about to enter the saloon where the tables were set out for play, and deemed it at first some error.

"A thousand pardons," said the Frenchman, bowing; "but I am charged with a commission."

"For me?"

"To you," repeated the officer, presenting the tablet as he spoke.

Wilmott took it, and read as follows:—"All is accomplished. Leave the house to-night before twelve, and for the future beware of Paulo. We never meet again."

"Any answer?" demanded the officer, whose fit of jealousy returned on seeing the Englishman's surprise and agitation as he perused the contents of the tablet.

"None," replied Wilmott, recollecting himself, "but to thank you, sir, for your trouble and attention. It is one of those communications which demand no reply."

"Scarcely a gallant answer," observed the Frenchman, his lip slightly curling in anger; for he thought that the stranger spoke slightingly of her he loved, and he was a little jealous as well.

"Certainly not a rude one," replied Wilmott, "since the writer would be probably very much displeased at a reply, as well as astonished. "Once more I thank you, sir, for your politeness, and repeat that the communication requires no answer."

The gentlemen bowed stiffly and separated, the speaker to the gaming-tables, and the young officer to his seat by the countess, once more to indulge in intoxicating dreams of love, from which he was destined, however, to be suddenly and cruelly awakened.

Wilmott played with his usual success. Paulo and his partner were furious, as they watched the scanty funds, upon which they had commenced the bank that night, rapidly diminish; and Faddle, who, from his exhausted means, had for several evenings been a mere looker-on, insinuated more than once that such a continued run of good luck must be the result of foul play. At this time the dial on the chimney-piece marked half an hour to twelve. Wilmott took advantage of the insinuation to throw down the little rake used at the table by those who played, and declare that, until the assertion was retracted, he should play no more. Many who had watched his career in the house with interest, and been pleased with his gentlemanly manner, gathered round. The officers, too, gradually slunk into the room.

"I repeat it," said Faddle; "there must have been foul play."

"Prove it! prove it!" exclaimed several.

"Or stand a convicted liar!" added Wilmott, pale with rage. "Look on him, gentlemen; observe him well. When I first knew that man I was young,

rich, and honoured. He wormed himself into my confidence—plundered me at the gaming table—sold me to his confederates—till I became all but a ruined man; and, to complete his treachery, endeavoured to deprive me of the affections of my wife. For this I cast him off—for this I brand him as a dishonoured cur—for this I cast the lie in his teeth—brave and defy him! Let him deny it if he can."

Faddle was so astonished at the unexpected display of resolution on the part of his former dupe, and the glances of indignation which the guests cast on him, that his usual effrontery deserted him; and muttering something about Wilmott's hearing from him in the morning, he sneaked out of the room, and left the house.

"Never mind," said the count, desperately; for he saw that the hour of grace given by his creditors had almost expired. "To prove how firm my confidence is in the honour of Monsieur Wilmott, I will propose to him one grand stake, the last for to-night. There are twenty-five thousand francs on the board — let him cover them, and one throw decide who is to be their owner."

"Agreed!" said the Englishman—"on one condition."

"Name it."

"That this gentleman," pointing to an aged officer, "holds the stakes—that he decides upon the fairness of the throws—and that from his decision there shall be no appeal."

"Do you doubt me, then?" demanded Paulo, trying to look as much as possible like insulted innocence; "I was more generous, just now, towards you."

"Say rather more just; for you know that I have played fairly."

"You have," exclaimed several; "inexplicable as your good fortune has seemed, we have watched you closely, and pronounce that your play has been that of a man of honour."

Wilmott bowed his thanks, and Paulo again hastily assured him that he was satisfied; he was eager for the coup—which, if successful, would give him fifty thousand francs to leave Paris with—to come off. It already wanted but ten minutes to the fatal hour. The notes, as Wilmott had stipulated, were accordingly placed in the hands of the officer, and the whole party crowded round the table to witness the throws.

"Fifteen!" said Paulo, triumphantly, as he uncovered the dice; "I think, Sir Englishman, you will scarcely beat that!"

A murmur of surprise broke from the company; the throw was an unusual one.

It was now Wilmott's turn; he took up the box, scarcely hoping to beat him, and threw as carelessly as if the stake had been for a few crowns, instead of a thousand pounds.

To the surprise of the company, no less than his own, he beat him.

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the old officer; "he has thrown eighteen!"

"Damnation!" muttered Paulo; "I am a beggar!" then suddenly recollecting that in two more minutes the house and costly furniture would be in the possession of the myrmidons of the law, he rushed from the saloon to the dressing-room of the countess, and, taking up one of the iron bars upon which the firewood rested, burst open her dressing-case, in the hope of finding her diamonds; but he was disappointed—they were gone.

"Ruined!" he muttered; "ruined without hope!"

The loud murmurs which he heard from the saloon informed him that the seizure had taken place, and that if he wished to retain his personal liberty he must escape from the house. Hastily cutting the cords which held up the heavy satin draperies of the curtains, he tied them together and let himself down into the garden. He had still his watch, and two diamond rings upon his fingers.

"These," he said, "are at least something to begin the world upon."

"Ay," whispered a voice near him, "and if wisely employed, to regain all that you have lost. I have known a princely fortune made from a worse beginning."

Paulo started, and turning round, beheld Faddle.

"You here, Englishman!"

"Why not, when your guests are all fled! Come," he added, "I bear you no ill-will for the few hundreds you fleeced me of, especially as I think we may be useful to each other."

"How useful?"

"Pshaw! you and I have seen too much of the world to need ask each other that question. My fortunes are desperate, and yours seem very little better."

"Pardon me, friend," said the Italian, a little haughtily; "but not so desperate as you seem to suppose. My wife still possesses diamonds to the amount of two hundred thousand francs."

"Which she has taken care to place out of your reach," interrupted Faddle. "Most likely the young fellow with whom she drove off half an hour since can tell you where they are deposited."

"What mean you?" demanded Paulo, turning deadly pale.

"That your wife has left you."

"Curse her!" said the count; "I see it all now; this is her revenge. She has beggared me to enrich her paramour, and they have fled to exult in my ruin, and laugh at the dupe they have made. But I'll be revenged if I follow her to the end of the world—to the depth of hell! I'll have it," he added, ferociously, "I'll have it!"

"But she has not gone off with Wilmott."

"With whom, then?"

"A dashing young officer of dragoons—the same upon whose arm she promenaded the saloons."

The exasperated count was not more furious than surprised at the intelligence. The proceedings of the lady had completely mystified him; the nature of her compact with the man whom she had made the instrument of her vengeance never once struck him, for his was a coarse nature, incapable of appreciating the refinement of a woman's revenge. In his despair he raved and cursed, and imprecated every possible malediction upon her head, designating her as a murderess and adulteress, and vowing to bring her to the scaffold.

"Would I had known this before!" thought Faddle to himself; "I would have humbled her pride."

It was neither humanity nor sympathy which kept him by the side of the infuriated man, but simply calculation. He required an associate for the enterprise he meditated, which was nothing less than the robbery, and possibly murder, both of Rose and her husband. The scorn and insult he had received from each rankled in his revengeful heart, goading him to madness; and he resolved, at any risk, to gratify his hate. Life he calculated, without money, was a blank; with it, it was every thing.

"Come," he said, "leave off howling like a wild Indian, and act like a man."

"What am I to do?" demanded Paulo.

"Our first business is to escape from here. My lodgings are not far distant. You can stop there for the night, and we will talk over matters. I have something to propose, which promises the two things dearest to our nature."

"And what are they?"

"Gold and revenge," said Faddle.

"Revenge?" repeated the Italian. "Put that before me, and I'll damn myself willingly to obtain it. Revenge either on the woman who has betrayed me, or the villain who has plundered me. I care not which one. I thirst for both with equal longing."

"You shall have both, on the word of a man who knows what vengeance is."

With these words they shook hands, and, springing over the garden-wall, found themselves in the deserted narrow street which ran at the back, from whence they reached Faddle's lodgings unperceived.

As our readers are aware, the countess and her companion left the house before the seizure of the furniture and plate by the men of law. The officer had provided a *chaise de poste* punctually at the hour prescribed by the woman whom he thought to make his mistress, but who only used him, as she had done others, to assist her in her plans.

"And where are we to drive?" he demanded, as he handed her into the carriage.

"To St. Denis," was the laconic reply.

The order was given, and during the hour's drive to the town, which is not more than six miles from Paris, the young man, like most young men when in love, poured forth reiterated assurances of his passion and promises of fidelity, which were listened to in silence.

"Where am I to stop?" demanded the postilion as he entered the Place d'Armes.

The officer looked to his companion.

"At the Convent of the Sacred Heart," was her reply to his mute interrogation.

"Convent!" he faltered.

"Remember your promise," she whispered; "I expect to find my heart's last treasure there."

"Your child, perhaps?" he observed.

"I have no child," she replied in a voice of emotion; "Heaven hath spared me the misery of being a mother; no innocent creature will ever blush on hearing its parent named, or curse my memory. No, no," she added, bursting into tears, "Heaven hath spared me that!"

"Shall we remain long at the convent?"

"I have but a paper to give to the superior," replied the countess evasively. "I have no wish that my sojourn should be long. I shall be as anxious as you can be to quit it."

Her companion was satisfied. He little thought that, by quitting it, the speaker meant to be released from it by death. That alone was to release her from it.

The postilion had to ring twice at the gate before the sleepy portress could be roused. At first she declined disturbing her superior at such an unusual hour; but the sight of the seal upon the packet which the countess produced silenced all objections, and after a brief absence she returned; the gate was unlocked, and the lady admitted within the interior.

"Am I to wait for you here?" demanded her companion uneasily; for he began to suspect that all would not end as he had anticipated.

"But a few minutes," replied the countess, as she followed the portress from the parlour into the interior of the building; "but a few minutes."

More than an hour had elapsed before the portress returned; when she did so, it was alone. But she brought a message from the countess, requesting the gentleman to call at ten o'clock the following morning, as she had decided on passing the night in the convent with the sisterhood.

"It is not exactly the arrangement I expected," muttered the disappointed young man, as he made his way to the chaise; "and I begin to suspect that the beautiful countess has made a fool of me. No matter; patience till the morning; we shall see—we shall see."

At the appointed hour he repaired to the convent, and was admitted at once to the parlour, when, after waiting a short time, the door opened, and the abbess, whom he recognised from her chain and cross, made her appearance, followed by a veiled sister. In deference to her rank, he remained standing till the amiable mother had taken her seat, and motioned him to follow her example.

"You expected, I believe, to see the Countess de Villa?" she observed, with a slight pursing of the lips, as if the subject of conversation shocked her notions of propriety, and was unfitted to her sacred lips, which were supposed to be devoted only to prayer.

"Expected to see her!" repeated the young man; "why I came for no other purpose!"

"Forget your disappointment," continued the venerable lady; "but the countess has ceased to exist."

"What! dead!" exclaimed the horror-stricken soldier.

"To the world, for ever, in obedience to an order which it would be sacrilege to resist. We have this day, at early mass, invested her with the habit of our order and the veil of St. Theresa. Through me the now happy penitent expresses her gratitude for the generous protection you have afforded her, and begs you to forgive the deceitful hope held out to you—a hope which circumstance, although it cannot justify, may palliate; and at the disappointment of which, my son, you ought to rejoice, since Heaven, in disappointing your earthly passion, has spared your soul from sin."

"Sin!" said the young man, furiously; "sin at five-and-twenty! I loved her, mother, not with a light boyish passion, but the deep reverence of manhood's love. She was dear to my heart as the stream which animates it—dearer;—and to find that I have wasted my feelings on a heartless, cold coquette! No matter; the lesson, though bitter, perhaps will not be thrown away. I shall know how to judge the sex in future."

"Not from my unworthiness," said the nun, raising her veil, and discovering the pale but still beautiful features of the countess. "Let me not carry to the grave or the solitude of my cell the bitter reproach that I have blighted thy young heart. Would I had known thee better! Would I had trusted to thy generosity, and not thy passion! But didst thou know how cruelly my trust in human faith is broken—how I have been outraged and deceived by all I ever loved, thou wouldst forgive me."

"Sister," said the superior, sternly, "is this thy promise—this thy obedience?"

"Forgive me, mother," meekly replied the penitent;

"but my heart was full; I could not bear the reproach I felt I merited. Forgive me," she added, turning her black, lustrous eyes to her late companion, "oh, forgive me!"

"Freely," said the young man, deeply moved by her agony and tears; "be the wound deep or slight upon my heart, I forgive it freely. I have this consolation, that if not mine, thy heart will never be another's."

"Never," said the nun; "long ere it knew thee it was ashes. Forgive the deception which my friendless misery practised—forgive the treacherous hopes and pain which I have caused thee—forgive me and forget me!"

"Never!" said the young man with a passionate burst of sorrow; "never can I forget you! you are the first woman whose image was imprinted on my heart; no other can efface it. Freely do I forgive the pain you have caused, the heart you have broken."

Fixing her eyes with an expression which for years afterwards haunted his memory, the unhappy Countess de Villa slowly let fall her veil, and passed from the grating with the abbess. In this world they never met again.

It would, perhaps, be speculating somewhat too curiously to inquire whether, at the moment of her final retirement from the world, this passionate being, one of the conditions of whose existence seemed to be that she should love, did not feel a regret at the vow her lips had so lately breathed; that the conviction that she might still have found happiness in the arms of her lover did not render her convent cell more dreary, her sacrifice more painful. As for her soldier lover, his professional career took him to Africa, where he fought and shared the triumphs of many a hard-contested field; but neither in the camp nor the red plain of war did he forget the being who had passed like a glorious vision across his path, and if he lives he remembers her still with adoration, as well as pity.

About the same hour that the disappointed lover returned to Paris from St. Denis, Faddle entered the little chamber in which a bed had been hastily prepared by Lisette for her unexpected guest. The night had been exceedingly warm, and Paulo, in his nervous agitated sleep, had kicked the clothes partially off the couch, so that his feet were uncovered, and his host observed, with a smile, a red scar round the ankle of each leg.

"As I suspected," he muttered, "an escaped galley slave."

It is a singular fact that no space of time ever effaces the mark caused by the irons worn at the galleys. Whenever the police have a suspicion of any one that he has escaped from the Bagne, the first thing they do is to examine his legs—the test is conclusive. A Frenchman, who had risen, soon after the first restoration of the Bourbons in France, high in favour with the Duke de Berry, by means of forged papers and certificates of noble birth, turned out to be a felon, whose time had expired. His valet, whom he imprudently struck in the heat of passion, had seen the fatal mark and betrayed him.

While Faddle was still gazing upon him the sleeper awoke; their eyes met, and with a deep blush Paulo drew his legs under the coverlid, in the hope that the Englishman would not understand what a Frenchman would have comprehended in a moment.

"All right!" said his host. "I see you have been a martyr to your principles, as well as myself. Pshaw! some scores are honourable. You are not the first brave fellow who has been lagged."

"Lagged?" repeated the count, not exactly comprehending the term.

"Transported, or sent to the gallows, then," said Faddle, with a smile.

"How dare you suppose that I——"

His attempt at an indignant remonstrance was cut short by his host quietly pointing to the scars upon his legs. He felt denial to be useless.

"At least," he faltered, "I was innocent."

"Of course. So we are all. I never yet knew a returned transport or a *pie rouge* (the cant word in France for an escaped convict) 'who had not suffered innocently.'"

"*Pie rouge!*" repeated Paulo. "Why, then, you have—eh?"

Faddle quietly threw off his slipper, and drew down the sock, till he displayed upon his ankle a scar similar to the one he had remarked upon the sleeper. No sooner did the fellow perceive it, and satisfy himself that it was real by touching it, than he burst into a hearty laugh, and the two ruffians embraced with the cordiality of old acquaintances.

"Where were you baptised?" demanded Faddle.

"In Genoa. And you?"

"In France, when a mere boy. But that is past and forgotten now. No one suspects in the Englishman the lad whose name was once the gossip of Paris."

"Was it for robbery?" demanded Paulo.

"No—revenge. I was rich—at least comparatively so—and had no need to plunder."

"Ah! revenge!" repeated the Italian. "Cold as you are, you Englishmen like revenge."

"Why not? Is the fire in the breast of Etna less glowing because snow reposes on its summit?"

The ruffian perfectly understood the simile, and nodded approval.

"You hate the Englishman?" he observed.

"As bitterly as you do," was the reply.

"It seems, then, he is our mutual enemy?" continued the count. "He has plundered me and insulted you; though how the devil he contrived the former I am at a loss to guess; for, to give the rascal his due, he played fairly. I would I knew his secret! I would make a fortune by it."

"Two things," said Faddle, "are to be done, and then my business in Paris will be finished."

"What are they?" demanded his guest.

"That we must get back the money he has won."

"Good!" said Paulo, with an expression of intense satisfaction; "and then——"

"Next, cut his throat."

The low, hissing tone in which Faddle whispered his horrible purpose startled even the Italian, accustomed as he was to the perpetration of every crime; and he gazed as one of the inferior spirits may be supposed to have gazed upon Lucifer—with awe as well as supreme admiration and terror.

"You are a bold man," he replied.

"At least a resolute one," continued the libertine. "I hate him for many reasons."

"What are they?"

"Don't I love his wife?—What the devil's that?" he added, as he fancied he heard a rustling at the door, which he hastily opened. No one was there.

"Lisette! Lisette!" he called, "is breakfast ready?"

The question was a mere feint; but he wished to as-

certain whether she had been listening or not to their conversation.

"Ready! no," replied the Frenchwoman in a tone of petulance; "I am not half dressed yet. Do you think I can blow my things on, as you men creatures do?"

"All right," he exclaimed, winking to his friend, as he closed the door. But he was mistaken; it was not all right. He did not yet know Lisette.

That same night the two now sworn friends made their way to the back of the house in which Wilmott and his wife lodged. Paulo climbed up the water-spout with the agility of a cat, and remained for more than an hour with his eye fixed to a crevice in the shutter of the saloon. At last, satisfied apparently with the survey he had taken, he descended to his companion, who had been watching below to prevent surprise.

"Well," demanded Faddle, "what have you seen?"

"My notes and gold," replied Paulo, with a savage grin; "he has been counting them over to his wife, and they discoursed on their projected voyage to America. It will be some time, I question, before they arrive there."

He passed his hand significantly across his throat as he spoke.

"And where did they place the money?"

"In the cabinet opposite the window. I saw him turn the key and give it to his wife. We must obtain it from her."

"Of course we must."

"At any price?"

"At any price," repeated Faddle. "Do you take me for one of those whining fools who, once resolved, return upon their purpose?"

"I have no fear of your resolution, but of their cries."

"I know how to silence them."

"Satan doubt you, for I do not," said Paulo. "One thing alone I would recommend," said the Italian, "and I have had some experience in my time. Begin with the woman, silence her first; they always make the most noise."

"Leave her to me; you settle Wilmott."

With this arrangement the two ruffians quitted the court at the back of the house, by means of the false keys which had enabled them to enter it, and made their way to a neighbouring anberge, there to fortify their courage with brandy, till the hour for putting their bloodthirsty design in execution should arrive. The house was one of those which the police permitted to be open at all hours of the night, in order to accommodate the fruitmen and vendors of milk, who, during the summer months, arrived in Paris with their merchandise, if the natural products of the earth may be so termed, and left again before the lazy citizens were stirring. Amongst the company seated at the tables were several broken-down Englishmen, who, having lost every thing at home, from which perhaps crime and folly had driven them, depended for a precarious subsistence upon the bounty or plunder of their countrymen, for whose arrival they annually looked out with the rapacity of hawks, and with about as much conscience. These fellows were easily recognised by their shabby-genteel appearance, restless eye, and that peculiar half-hungry, half-fierce look which characterises the human cormorant.

Seating themselves as far from his countrymen as the libertine and his comrade could, they called for a bottle of brandy, and began conversing on their project in a low tone in English. They had not been long seated before a ruddy, healthful-looking countryman, whose clean blouse and white shirt denoted that he came to see Paris by daylight, entered the room, and drew a seat near the speakers. He was evidently no stranger in the house, for the landlord recognised him with a knowing wink, and several suspicious-looking characters slunk out of the house immediately after his arrival.

"Speak English," said Faddle to his companion. "I don't half like that fellow."

"Pshaw! as genuine a clown as ever tramped from Normandy."

"May be, may be; but there is nothing like precaution."

"Oh, as many precautions as you please, when the job's done," said Paulo, gaily. "But tell me, what do you propose doing when all is over?"

"Returning to England. And you?"

"I shall follow your example. I have a pretty sprinkling of English lords upon my visiting list, and shall find no difficulty in being introduced into the best society — perhaps even dine with royalty itself."

Faddle did not at once reply, for what he esteemed as a bright thought had struck him. His newly found Italian friend might be serviceable to him in certain designs he had in view with reference to his future career, and it might be advantageous to encourage Paulo in his praiseworthy intention. So, with the recklessness of a man nursed in the lap of wrong, and perhaps to stifle some lingering pangs of conscience—for the most hardened have their compunctious visitations—he began to talk of their meditated visit to England, after the completion of their murderous undertaking, with a levity that bordered on the disgusting.

"Ah, my dear count—for so, I presume, I must still address you," said he,—"England is a glorious place for men of spirit. The wealth of the world flows into its ports, and the beauty and voluptuousness of Europe lie at its feet. Men of spirit and address have but to ask, and they obtain what they desire."

"Famous country!" chimed in Paulo. "But why do so many of its sons leave its favoured soil, and be so loth to return?"

"There are reasons, and weighty conclusions for such reluctance, no doubt," said Faddle, laughingly. "And to be plain, I begin to fancy this lovely region will be too hot for both of us ere long. But let us speak lower; that burly fellow, with the rustic complexion, has an eye that looks devilishly knowing."

"Bah! a clown! Look at his blouse."

Faddle did look at it, and he thought as he encountered the countryman's glance that there lurked in it something between a sneer and a mocking smile of intelligence. A labourer, he imagined, never carried such speaking signals in his head. Uneasy, and somewhat alarmed, he shifted his seat so as to place the object of his suspicion farther from him, and resumed his remarks upon England. Doubting his companion's discretion, he insisted upon the conversation being conducted in English, and changed the subject to that of women. Strange that men on the eve of committing the greatest crimes, or conducting the most important events, should seek relief from the pressure and contention of conflicting emotions in ribaldry or obscenity!

But it is as true as strange; our propensities first

lead us into error, and then amuse us with their vagaries when on the eve of its committal.

No sooner did Faddle and Paulo leave the house, than the pretended countryman rose and followed them. The instant he gained the street he threw off his blouse, and appeared in a dark-coloured uniform, such as is generally worn by the police, and changing his straw hat for a *bonet de police*, glided along the walls, taking care to screen himself from observation as much as possible. Carefully concealing himself, he watched them as they cleared the slight barrier which separated the piece of waste ground at the back of the mansion, then crept upon his hands and knees close to the paling, and applied his eye to the crevices to note their proceedings.

The sergeant de ville—for such was the spy's real office—had not been long in this situation when he was startled by a hand being laid upon his shoulder; looking up, he beheld one of his comrades, who, like himself, was upon the watch.

"What is the scent, Pierre?" demanded the new comer.

"Only a couple of housebreakers. Where's the guard?"

"In the next street."

"Take them round to the front of the house," said Pierre, "and when I give the signal enter No. 37, stop all you meet upon the stairs, let no one pass, especially if they are English."

"English!" repeated the man in astonishment; "why you don't mean to say that?"

"Never mind what I mean to say," interrupted his superior; "this is neither the time nor place for explanation. Trust to me, the case is worth attending to. There is both money and promotion to be earned. Monsieur le Prefect himself ordered me to be on the look-out, and you know it is not often that he interests himself in such matters. When you have informed the guard, bring three or four of the men with you, and return to me here."

The man started off upon his errand without reply. When money or promotion are hinted at, a Frenchman is sure to be on the alert.

Wilmott and Rose were sleeping in their chamber, unconscious of the danger which threatened them. A cot in which little Richard, the issue of their ill-assorted union, reposed, was drawn close to the bedside. Under a recess facing the window was one of

those cabinets which are so generally found in every chamber in France: the key, fortunately for the safety of the sleepers, was left in. Wilmott's dreams were disturbed: fortune, it is true, had once more smiled upon him, but his gains had not brought peace to his heart; the recollection of that dreadful night, when his hands became stained with blood, was ever present to him; and the fate of poor Hawk, who had been sacrificed to screen him and Faddle, haunted his pillow. In his dreams he saw him as he beheld him on the morning of his execution, dangling from the fatal beam. The very air he breathed seemed to him to smell of blood. Waking or sleeping, conscience poisoned life by the recollection of his crimes. A sharp creaking noise was heard; it was Paulo with his diamond ring cutting the window to enable him to introduce his hand to open it. He had almost succeeded, when his companion, who was perhaps the more experienced villain of the two, whispered to him:

"Stop; it will fall inside and alarm the sleepers."

"No matter, we can easily settle them," replied the Italian in the same under-tone.

"Not so easily as you imagine; Wilmott is a powerful fellow, and I am sure is not without arms. Try the sucker."

"Have you brought one?"

"Catch me without the implements of my trade," said Faddle, "and I'll forgive you. I am not so green as that."

With these words the ruffians changed places, and the speaker, after moistening it well in his mouth, applied to the half-severed pane of glass one of those common suckers that school-boys make with a piece of leather and a string, to raise stones with.

"Does it hold?" demanded Paulo.

"Like a lawyer's conscience. Now, then, give me the ring."

The Italian handed him the diamond, and the operation was speedily completed, the cut glass being cleverly drawn outside by means of the ingenious contrivance.

Having both entered the apartment without disturbing the sleepers, Faddle cautiously made his way to the cabinet, leaving Paulo to guard the bed, lest either Rose or her husband should awake. From the state of the chamber it was evident that the inmates had been preparing for their departure: trunks were packed, papers and letters had been burnt; all indicated a removal.

"I think we have stopped their journey," whispered the Italian, with a grin; and he drew his knife, and crept close to the curtain.

"What would you do?"

"Pay the rascal some portion of my debt," said Paulo. "I am not one of those who either forget or forgive easily."

"Fool!" said Faddle, "the present hour is for plunder, not revenge. A thousand opportunities will occur for the latter—few for the first. Recollect that if we deprive him of his winnings it will be impossible for him to leave Paris. We shall have time enough for revenge."

"But should he awake?"

"Bury your knife in his throat, and leave me to settle the woman. I have an old account to balance with her."

"A love affair?"

"Something of love, and more of hate. She scorned me. Few ever did so with impunity."

These words were exchanged in a tone so low that they failed to disturb the sleepers, and the speaker crept stealthily towards the cabinet, while his comrade remained on guard. After a few moments' hurried search, Faddle found on one of the drawers the prize he had been seeking—a roll of bank notes, Wilmott's winnings at the gaming-table.

"All's right," he whispered. "Come."

No lover ever quitted his mistress, or miser his wealth, with more regret than Paulo did the bed-side of the sleepers. Like most Italians, revenge to him was dearer than gold, and nothing but the hope of again encountering the man he hated could have induced him to quit the room without imbruing his hands in his blood, when he had been so completely in his power.

"Come," added Faddle, impatiently, "or I am off alone."

The last hint was sufficient. The money, the prize for which they had hazarded so much, was in the speaker's possession, and Paulo had not so high an opinion of his companion's honesty as to trust him with it alone. He knew the true value of the proverb of honour amongst thieves.

Descending from the window by the same means they had mounted—namely, the water-spout at the back of the house—they found themselves once more in the waste ground, with only the palings between them and the lonely deserted street.

"I think we have nicked them this time," said Faddle. "Why a London cracksman might make a fortune at Paris. The police, with all their boasting, are not worth a damn."

"Ain't they?" replied Paulo, following Faddle's example, and mounting the palings; "don't cry till you are out of the wood. The police have as many tricks as a fox, and double like a hound. For my part, I shall not deem myself safe till I have placed the Alps between us."

"They be damned!" said Faddle.

As the two robbers dropped to the ground—for the last observations had been made while they were climbing the barrier—they found themselves seized by half-a-dozen men, who, with a dexterity which convinced them into whose hands they had fallen, handcuffed them in an instant. The Italian, with the impetuosity of his countrymen, raged and stormed like a madman; the Englishman, on the contrary, took it coolly: his only observation was:

"The darbies, by God!"

Pierre, the sergeant de ville, who had so cleverly conducted the capture, gave a loud whistle, and a fiacre drove up to where they were standing. The prisoners were handed in, and the whole party driven off to the prefecture of police; Paulo continually exclaiming, as they rode along:

"Why did I not stab him, *cospetto*? why did I not stab him?"

As soon as they arrived, they were both searched. The notes, and what money they had upon their persons, as well as every instrument by which they could injure either themselves or others, were taken from them and carefully noted down in a book kept for the purpose. This was no sooner done, than they were locked up in one of the strongest cells till morning.

"Take it coolly," said Faddle to his companion, who was pacing his cell, cursing and gesticulating like a maniac. "If I could only communicate with Wilmott, all would be right yet."

"How right?" demanded Paulo.

"Because I have a hold over him which even his

wife does not suspect; and he knows that if this trifling affair is made a subject of annoyance to me in France, I can cause him to be hanged in England!"

"Trifling do you call it? Do you not know that housebreaking and robbery in France are punished with death—especially," added the Italian, "with old offenders?"

"I wish I could see Wilmott.'

"Impossible.''

"Or send to him."

"That may be managed. But are you sure of your hold over him?"

"Certain."

"What is it?" inquired the Italian, eagerly.

"That is my secret," said Faddle. "While I keep it, I am its master; if once I reveal it, even to a pal like you, I become its slave."

"But will it save us both?" demanded Paulo.

"It must, since one cannot be saved without the other."

"Then I'll find you the means of sending to the Englishman. You saw the fellow who made the round of the cells just now?"

"I did."

"He and I are old acquaintances. If I could only speak with him before our examination in the morning, all would be right."

At this moment fortune, as if to favour the Italian's project, sent the party of whom he had been speaking into the cell; his ostensible errand was to bring a jug of water—his real one to see if the prisoners required his services, which, for money, he was at all times ready to offer. From his long residence in the prison, which he seldom or ever left, he was entirely unsuspected by the authorities, and many a prisoner had contrived to baffle the ends of justice through the assistance of "Père Joseph," as he was familiarly called, who had amassed by his complaisance a sum of money sufficient to have placed him in independence for the rest of his life; but such were not his ideas; his only pleasure in the possession of gold was to count it.

"Good night, Père Joseph," said Paulo, as soon as he had placed the jug upon the floor.

"Good night," said the old man, raising his head, and regarding him.

"Why, don't you know me?"

"I meet so many gentlemen in misfortune, that it is impossible I should recollect them all. Have we ever had any transactions together?"

The Italian whispered something in the gaoler's ear, which startled him; for it was evident, even by the light of the lamp which he carried, that he turned pale.

"I know—I remember," he hurriedly exclaimed. "*I do* remember you. Tell me, how can I serve you?"

"By conveying a letter to an English gentleman near the Place Vendome."

"You know I never undertake to convey letters. If found, I should lose my place, and the writing might compromise the writer. If men were of my opinion," he added, "they would never put pen to paper. Many a fine fellow I have known leave the cell of the prison for the scaffold, and all through having learnt to write. If I am to serve you, you must trust me."

"Dare I?" whispered Faddle to his companion.

"With your life," said Paulo.

The gaoler heard the question without betraying the least emotion either of anger or surprise. So he obtained his price, he was indifferent to all else.

"You are an Englishman," he observed; "and that may account for your suspicion. I may betray my duty to the authorities, but never to those who trust me. I have listened to stranger confidences than the priest. Tales of such terror and crime have been whispered in my ears, that the wonder is they are not deaf with listening to them. Yet not for gold, interest, or fear, have I ever been known to betray the trust reposed in me."

"That's true," said the Italian. "There's not a fellow at St. Michel but would vouch for Father Joseph's fidelity, even though he damns his avarice."

"Why yes," said the old man, with a chuckle, "'tis true I have my price. I always get my price."

"And what may that be?" demanded Faddle, "to convey a message this side of the Place Vendome?"

"Let me see," said Joseph, hesitating; "you have been taken on a capital charge; the plunder taken from you—and—yes—two hundred francs—paid beforehand. I never give credit, unless to a nobleman, or some such citizen whose means are beyond dispute. Two hundred francs," he added, "is the lowest sum."

Faddle looked at Paulo, to help him in the extremity; every thing he had upon his person had been taken from him at the office; he was literally without a single coin.

An idea suddenly struck him to send to Lisette, whose affection, he doubted not, would induce her to sacrifice every thing to serve him in his present position.

"Can you send to my lodgings for the money?" he demanded.

"Yes, but it will cost you twenty francs more."

"No matter, send to No. 16, Rue de Prince, and demand to speak with Madame Lisette."

"Pooh!" interrupted the gaoler, with an air of disappointment; "it will be of no use to send to her."

"No use?"

"None."

"Why not?"

"She denounced you, to be sure; she cried bitterly while she did so; still she denounced you; most likely you had broken her heart before she brought herself to do it. But women," he added, "sometimes find strength, even in despair; at least they never lack it to revenge themselves on those who have betrayed them."

"Damnation!" muttered the ruffian, suddenly recollecting the scene of the preceding morning; "then she overheard our conversation after all."

"No doubt," said Paulo.

"What is to be done?"

"Why I suppose," continued the Italian, "that I must come to your assistance; but you promise me that the hold you have over Wilmott will save us both?"

"It must, since he cannot appear against one without compromising the other."

"Enough. Father Joseph, lend me a knife."

Without a moment's hesitation the old man took from his pocket a sharp-pointed penknife, and placed it in the hand of the speaker, who endeavoured to rip open the lining of his coat, but the fetters prevented him.

"Can I assist you?"

"Ay do, Joseph; you will find it more readily than I shall."

Following the directions of the prisoner, the gaoler ripped open the lining and drew forth a note for five hundred francs—more than double the amount he

demanded; but he was too honourable, in his way, to take any advantage of that.

"What am I to do with the change?"

"Keep it till we are sent to the prison, and remit it to me there."

"Good," said Joseph, pocketing the note; "and now, sir, for your message."

Faddle approached the speaker and remained whispering with him for several minutes.

Paulo, who had supplied the means of bribing the gaoler in the hope of saving himself, gazed upon his countenance while the communication was being made, in the expectation of gleaning something of its purport, but in vain; the features of the old man maintained their usual imperturbable expression; he had been made the depository of too many fearful secrets to wince or express surprise even at a tale so fearful as Faddle's.

"I think that will be a choker," said the ruffian, as Joseph moved slowly towards the door.

"Probably," said the old man.

"He will never dare appear against us."

"I should think not."

"And when will you send to him?" demanded Faddle.

"Within an hour before the examination in the morning," replied the gaoler; "rely upon my punctuality; your companion there will tell you that I have never yet been known to forfeit my word."

"Never," said Paulo.

No sooner was the honest functionary gone than Faddle began to rave and storm, vowing vengeance against Lisette for her treachery in denouncing him to the police.

"But for her," he exclaimed, "our retreat would have been sure; we should have had wealth enough in America, or some other land, to play again the game of fortune which we have so completely lost in this. If ever I see the viper again, let her look to it! I am not a man to be betrayed, even by a woman, with impunity."

"Pshaw!" said the Italian, with a sneer; "we are all betrayed by them in our turn."

"Perhaps so, but not without reason. And what reason have I given her?"

"Have you forgotten the way in which you spoke of getting rid of her?" demanded Paulo. "Indifference and infidelity are the last injuries a woman brings herself to forgive, and Lisette has only acted like the rest of her sex."

The next morning, just as Wilmott was preparing to leave the house to attend the examination of the thieves at the prefecture of police, the servant informed him that a priest demanded a few moments' conversation with him. Thinking it was some application for charity, such as English residents of supposed fortune are continually being pestered with, he declined seeing him, for he was too much irritated by the events of the night to receive any unnecessary visitor. After delivering her message the domestic again returned.

"Well, what now?" demanded her master.

"Monsieur le Abbé says that he must see you."

"Must see me!"

"Yes, monsieur; it is of the utmost importance before you go to the police; he even hinted that your own safety depended upon the granting him an interview."

"My safety!" repeated the astonished Wilmott; "what can the impudent rascal mean?"

Rose, whose anxiety for her husband's safety had for months past been nervously excited, begged of him to receive his strange visitor, and left the room in order that they might be alone.

Shortly afterwards the Abbé Marcourt—a tall, thin old man, whose attenuated appearance denoted that his life had been that of an ascetic or invalid—entered the room. There was a quiet dignity and gentleness of deportment about him, which, despite his anger, induced Wilmott to receive him with politeness. He even placed a chair for his visitor, before he requested to be informed of the purport of his visit.

"I come from the prison," said the priest.

His host stared, as if to ask what it could possibly signify to him where he came from.

"And with the entreaty," continued the abbé, "of one of the wretched men who were last night taken by the police, after having plundered you of a large sum of money."

"Which I rejoice to hear," said the Englishman, "is quite safe in the hands of the police."

"In their hands, certainly; but how far it may be safe is another question."

"How! do you mean to insinuate that——"

"I insinuate nothing. My errand is merely to deliver a message. Are you acquainted with a certain Captain Faddle?"

"I was—the villain!"

"You are doubtless aware that he is one of the robbers?"

"Faddle!" repeated the terror-stricken Wilmott, the danger of his position suddenly flashing upon him. "Is it possible? Faddle reduced to turn housebreaker!"

"Perhaps," said the priest, "he ran no risk."

"What mean you?"

"That you will not appear against him."

"And why should I not appear against him?" demanded Wilmott, haughtily. "Is it because, under the mask of friendship, he has stripped me of fortune, and attempted the honour of my wife—broken every tie which men of honour hold in respect?"

"My errand," answered his visitor, "is one of peace. I have neither advice nor assistance to give. You must judge for yourself. The crime of which your former friend is accused is one which, if proved against him, entails the penalty of death. Now it seems he has a peculiar objection *to suffer alone*."

"His companion may share his fate," observed Wilmott, turning pale.

"That will not suffice. He declares that on his first examination he shall confess that he and you last winter committed a murder in London, for which a certain Major Hawk innocently suffered."

"Liar and villain!"

"The confession will be instantly transmitted to the English ambassador, inquiries made, and if sufficient evidence exists, a demand from the English government will be accorded by the authorities here for your extradition. You best know," he added, "if you are prepared to brave the investigation."

Wilmott started from his chair, and paced the room in a violent agitation. The fear which so long had haunted him at last stood realised. Death in all its hideous terrors stared him in the face. His visitor eyed him in silence.

"But what am I to do?" he demanded.

"If your safety requires it, leave Paris."

"Without money it is impossible; and all I possess in the world is in the hands of the police."

"In that case you must remain."

"But are there no means of recovering it without appearing upon the trial?"

The priest smiled at the simplicity of the question. None but a foreigner could have for an instant imagined any thing so unlikely as the police of France once releasing the grasp upon a sum like two hundred thousand francs till they were compelled by law; and even then a considerable portion would be sure to stick to their fingers.

"You smile!" said the unhappy man. "If I could only compromise."

"There is no compromise to be made with the authorities," said his visitor.

"Could I see the prisoner?"

"That perhaps might be managed—but it must be done directly. I am the chaplain of the prison. Why I have taken upon me an office incompatible with the character of my profession, perhaps you will never learn; but we are all the slaves of circumstances."

It was finally agreed that the abbé and Wilmott should proceed at once to the hotel of the prefecture of police, and the latter endeavour, through the ministry of Joseph, to obtain a few minutes' conversation with his former friend. The unhappy man was in a fever till they arrived there. The same argument which had prevailed upon the gaoler to send Faddle's message to Wilmott induced him to introduce the latter into the cell where the prisoners were confined. A smile passed over the countenances of both the ruffians as they saw him enter. They felt that they were saved.

"So," said Faddle, "we meet again."

"Under what wretched circumstances!" replied his visitor. "Oh! Frank, Frank, have I deserved this at your hands?"

"Perhaps not. But I am in for it; and we must sink or swim together."

"What mean you?"

"That if you appear against me I split."

"Who will believe you?" demanded his dupe.

"All who hear me. Fool!" added the ruffian, "do you think that I have not taken the precaution at any time I please to hang you? I know you changed your share of the plunder with Sharp. I have the original numbers of the notes in the handwriting of the bankers. The proof is easy; and, by heavens! if I must die, we die together."

"But the money is in the hands of the police."

"I know it."

"They won't give it up till after the trial."

"Who the devil expects them?"

"It is all I possess in the world," added Wilmott.

"And my neck is all I possess in the world," observed Faddle, "so we shall commence life again on equal terms. Do you think me such an idiot," he added, "as to sacrifice myself to save you? How little do you know the world!"

"You have but ten minutes more, gentlemen," observed Joseph, who always treated his customers with the greatest politeness, no matter how dreadful the crime of which they were accused. "The chief of the police is as punctual as the clock itself."

"What do you decide on?" demanded Faddle.

"To die," replied Wilmott, resolutely. "I will not leave my wife and child to beggary and starvation."

"Is that your resolution?"

"It is,"

"Why, then," said Faddle, with an affected gaiety, which contrasted but badly with his flushed cheek, "hey for the gallows! Better an honest English cord than a Frenchman's rascally knife. How the mob will hoot, Dick, when we make our appearance upon the scaffold! The greasy rascals love fair play, and our evidence against poor Hawk will damn us in their opinion. I should not be astonished if they even pelted us."

The image thus artfully conjured up completely unnerved the unhappy partner of his crime, producing the very effect which the speaker had calculated upon.

"What can I do?" wildly demanded Wilmott. "Your crime has left me penniless."

Here Paulo, who perfectly understood English, thought that it was high time for him to interfere, for he foresaw that unless some arrangement was entered into there would be little chance of his escaping the galleys, at the very least; and deeply as he hated Wilmott, his self-love got the better of his antipathy.

"As for the money, that may easily be arranged," he quietly observed.

"How?" demanded the two former friends.

"Let Mr. Wilmott appear this morning, say as little as possible to criminate us, but identify his property, for which the police will give him a receipt, as they are sure to retain the notes as proof to be produced upon our trial."

"How will that serve us?" demanded Faddle.

"Don't be impatient. On depositing the receipt with any banker, they will allow him, by paying a commission, to draw perhaps half the sum. He must content himself with that."

"What then will become of us?" repeated his comrade.

"Why," resumed Paulo, "Wilmott leaves France before the day of trial; no evidence appearing against us, we are acquitted. Of course," he added, "he will not object to leave us part of the money he obtains through our forbearance, to take us out of the country, since it is in your power to prevent his touching a penny of it."

Hopeless, terrified, and conscience-stricken, the unhappy man consented to the arrangement, which promised him the means of flying from Europe. The compact was made, sworn to by all the three, Joseph looking on all the while, as though he did not understand a word of what had passed, and yet the old rascal knew English as well as any there. Perhaps it may be thought that the character of Joseph is an over-drawn and unnatural one. Those who have ever had the misfortune to fall into the hands of the police at Paris, either for debt or political offences, under the late reign, will at once recognise him. The writer of these pages, not twenty-four hours before putting them to paper, shook hands with his son, an officer of engineers, whom he had known while a student in the college of Charlemagne, in Paris.

At the examination which took place, Wilmott acted as agreed upon, taking care to recognise only the notes; a sum of five thousand francs in gold he declared not to be his property.

"Whose can it be, then?" demanded the chief of the police.

"Claim it," whispered Paulo to Faddle; "I dare not, my creditors would seize it."

"Why mine, to be sure," said the latter.

"Yours, fellow!"

"Mine," repeated the prisoner; "and I appeal to Mr. Wilmott whether in England I did not keep my carriage and maintain an honourable position in the world."

"What say yon, sir?" demanded the magistrate, addressing Wilmott.

"That the prisoner's statement is true. I have known him slightly for many years, and frequently met him in the best society."

"The fact is," said the ruffian, "I have been a loser at play lately, and Wilmott a winner."

"That does not authorise you to rob him," said the chief of the police; "besides, your association with this person, who calls himself the Count de Villa, is suspicious; there is little doubt, however, but that more will come out upon the trial."

The receipt was given, signed by the prefect of police, under whose guardianship the money remained, to Wilmott, and the prisoners were sent off to one of the public prisons. Faddle's last look at his former friend as he was removed from the room in which the examination had taken place was menacing; it seemed to bid him keep faith or prepare to die together.

About a month before the trial was to take place, on depositing, as Paulo had directed, the receipt with a banker, Wilmott raised about a third of the sum in the hands of the police, and three days afterwards started with his wife and child for America. The robbers, for want of sufficient evidence, of course were acquitted, but ordered to leave the country, to the frontiers of which they were conducted by the authorities, who handed over to Faddle a portion of the gold which Wilmott had not claimed, to pay his expenses to London; the rest they coolly told him he must prove his title to before it could be given up. As he never did prove his title to it, there it remains, most probably, till this day, unless the necessities of the republican government have compelled them to make use of it.

Seven years had elapsed since the events in Paris we have endeavoured to describe, when, on a bitter cold night in December, a miserable man, wretchedly dressed, was seen crossing the City Road at the end nearest to Finsbury Square, and inquiring his way to Spitalfields. His clothes, although faded and unsuited to the severity of the season, denoted that the wearer had seen better days. There was an air of gentility about them even in decay. With a look whose vacant stare betrayed the desolate position of the man, he regarded the passers-by as they hurried to the warm comforts of a fireside and a home, perhaps to the endearments of a domestic circle, or an affectionate family anxiously awaiting their return. Following the directions he had received, the lonely stranger dived down the narrow streets till he reached the small unhealthy one he had inquired for; here he paused again, and looked inquiringly around him, as if once more to ask his way. A respectable-looking man passed him at the moment.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he began; "but could you——"

"Nothing to give," said the man pettishly; "go to the relieving officer."

"You mistake, sir," said the wanderer, bitterly; "I am no beggar; I know London too well to expect to find charity in its streets."

"Not a beggar?" replied the artisan, eyeing him; "what the devil are you, then?"

"A stranger, who, having been absent from England for many years, would inquire for a lodging-house kept by one Walton."

"Oh, you mean the cellars, as they are called; I thought you were one of those who frequent that den of crime and vice. There, about ten doors further down on the left; you can't mistake it, the noise and confusion will guide you; had you been a week or two later you would have found it shut up; the parish are about to indict it for a nuisance."

"And what is to become of the poor wretches whose means leave them no other shelter?" demanded the stranger.

"Go to the parish; isn't there a poor-house? I am sure the rates are heavy enough!"

With these words the warmly-clad speaker buttoned his coat closer round his neck and walked hastily on. He was tired of answering questions, and knew that his comfortable tea and wife would be waiting for him at home.

"Brute!" muttered the wanderer, pursuing the way indicated; "'tis strange how prosperity harden the heart. No matter," he added; "humanity is but a nest of vipers, where every one is trying to sting its fellow. They may find that my fangs are not all drawn yet."

With these words the speaker continued his way till he reached the cellars indicated.

As the respectable man said, the noise would have guided him; for the night being bitterly cold, they were filled by a crowd of homeless wanderers who knew no other home. Over the steps which led into the reeking, unwholesome den was a board with the name of John Walton coarsely painted upon it, and underneath "Good lodgings for travellers; beds."

On reaching the bottom of the brick stairs, the new comer suddenly found himself in a company of about thirty persons, some seated at tables, drinking beer; these were the aristocrats of the party. There was also another group, chiefly composed of women, huddled round the fire-place. The stench from the close air, the various messes which were being cooked, and the fumes of tobacco, was overpowering. He almost wondered how any human being could endure it; and yet it was a relief after the bitter cold which he had endured for so many hours without.

"Can I have a bed, my good woman?" he demanded of a buxom-looking vulgar creature who was seated at a sort of bar in the centre of the place.

"For yourself?"

"Myself alone."

"Well, I suppose you can. But it's sixpence if you sleep alone, and fourpence for half a bed. We give no credit here, so money down."

The stranger put his hand in his pocket, and after hunting about for a second or two, drew from it half a crown. The time which he was in finding it excited the landlady's suspicion that it was a bad one. The truth was, it was his last.

"Humph!" she growled, after trying it between her teeth. "All right—I believe it is a good one."

"I am sure it is," humbly answered the man.

"There is the change," she added, giving him two shillings. "If you want to make tea, there is water boiling in the copper, and the rest of the things are on the shelf. Come," she added, leaving the bar, and addressing the women near the fire, who were chiefly fourpenny customers, "make room there! This good man looks half frozen, and you have been roasting there half the day."

With a quiet "thank you," the new comer took his seat. He was too much rejoiced at the idea of warming himself to notice that one of the women, as he passed, drew her shawl over her head so as to completely hide her features when he passed near her—

a fine little fellow, about nine years of age, was sitting by her side.

"Come, my little man," he observed, "here is room for both of us. Don't let me turn you away."

He held out his hand to draw the child near to the fire; but the woman, with a sort of convulsive energy, drew him away.

He had been quietly listening to the gossip of the poor creatures around him, when a smart-looking stout-built fellow, coarsely but warmly clad, entered the cellar with the air of a man who felt himself at home.

"Sure it's the master," whispered an Irishwoman to one of her companions. "The mistress will be in a good temper now."

"And well she may be, with such a clean-limbed lad for her husband. Sure he is too good for the likes of her. They say she hanged her first man to make room for him. If I had been the boy I wouldn't have had her, had her skin been stuffed with gold. Look how she is cosseting him."

The officious landlady no sooner saw the arrival of her better half, than she left her bar and began to assist him to remove his top coat and comforter, which, together with his hat, she removed into the little den at the back, generally known by the name of the mistress's room. The fellow, who permitted his wife's attentions with the air of an Adonis, approached the fire, when suddenly his and the stranger's eyes encountered, and they recognised each other in an instant.

"Captain!"

"Dick!"

"Silence!" said the former. "No names here."

"Lord bless me, sir," said the landlord, unable to conceal his surprise, "is that you? Why I can scarcely believe my eyes! What a change!"

"It is even so, Dick," replied his old master; for the stranger was no other than our readers' old acquaintance Faddle. "Fortune has played me a scurvy trick since last we met; but I shall soon be all right again."

"I hope so, sir," said the fellow, doubtingly; "it's a long lane that has no turning."

"And you—what are you doing?"

"Just keeping this bit of a place—I and my wife."

"Wife!" repeated his former master, catching at the word; "why how many have you got?"

"Hush! for the love of peace, not a word! She is as jealous as a fury! It is not a month since I nearly lost my life for kissing a girl who had been lodging here upwards of a month—all in the way of friendship."

"Of course, Dick," said Faddle, who knew what his old servant's friendship meant. "And how does business answer?"

"Oh, pretty well—just a crust and a shelter—but it is hardly earned."

"Indeed! I am glad, then, I have met with you. I shall soon require a servant;—you know my ways."

"I ought to do."

"And shall have your old place again."

"And what," demanded Dick, with a broad grin, as he cast his eye over the habiliments of the speaker, "am I to do? Brush your clothes?"

"Insolent!"

"Ditto," repeated Dick, sancily. "It's fine feathers which make fine birds; and the devil would not pick yours from a dunghill, unless he wanted to make a carecrow."

"You forget, Dick," said Faddle, with a scowl, "that I can hang you."

"No you can't," exclaimed the fellow, with a look of defiance; "the forgery is burnt."

"There's your mistake," observed his old master. "I only pretended to destroy it. You were too useful and too deeply entrusted with my secrets to be suffered to run loose. The paper is still in my possession, and I can hang you within a month if I please."

The impudent look of poor Dick suddenly fell as he heard the fearful declaration of his old master's power over him. He knew the speaker too well to doubt that he was both able and willing, if provoked, to fulfil his threat, and his manner suddenly became as humble and cringing as it had been bold and full of defiance.

"It is no use, sir," he said. "I know I am in your power; you can do with me as you please."

"You have found your senses, then, at last?"

"Of course, sir, since you have got the whip hand of me. What can I do to serve you?"

"In the first place let me have something to eat, for I am nearly famished."

The obsequious Dick, much to his better half's astonishment, set about preparing supper in the little room for his unwelcome guest. To all her inquiries as to who the stranger was, he only replied by informing her that he was a gentleman who in a few days would repay them nobly for their pains.

"But are you sure," she demanded, "that you are not deceived?"

"Was I ever deceived?" he replied, chucking her under the chin, to keep her in a good humour. "Besides, I once lived with him, and know what I am about."

The meal, to the surprise of the lodgers, was prepared in the mistress's room, and the stranger waited upon by the master himself.

"Well, Dick," he exclaimed, as soon as he had satisfied his hunger, "tell me what has occurred since I left England. Have you ever heard or seen any thing of Wilmott?"

"Nothing, sir; but his cousin, Miss Briarton, was married a fortnight ago."

"Indeed! To whom?"

"Walter Maynard."

"The clerk."

"Who is now," continued the man, "a partner, and soon will be the head of the firm. I heard one of the men say that the old gentleman intended to give up every thing."

"Lucky fellow."

At this moment one of the lodgers, not seeing either the mistress or master of the house at the bar, entered the room to request change for a sovereign. The circumstance was so unusual that Dick could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses; and his companion, struck by the sound of the voice, turned round, and stood face to face with his former friend and dupe Wilmott. For awhile they stood gazing upon each other like two men starting from a dream; neither could believe the meeting real. Faddle, with his usual self-possession, was the first to speak.

"Wilmott!" he exclaimed.

"Faddle!"

"Well, this is a singular rencontre. What chance brings us together after so many years' separation?"

"No good one," thought Dick, as he saw the two men, whom he suspected to be the murderers of the stranger, together. "There is something more than

accident in this. Perhaps Providence intends to bring their crimes to light at last."

"And where is Rose?" demanded Faddle.

"In the next room, I believe, with her boy."

"Where have you been all these years?"

"In America. And you?"

"In France, Italy, Germany: in short, half over the world. But since we have met," continued the captain, "let us forget the past, and be friends. We are not too old to make our fortunes yet. We may be useful to each other. I have a project in my head."

"What is it?"

Faddle looked first at Dick and then towards the door. The latter understood the hint, and walked quietly out, but instantly returned, to inform Wilmott that some one was asking for his wife.

"Who is it?" he demanded.

"An old rogue who was once a sort of a rival of mine—a fellow from your uncle's factory, sir."

"How," said the astonished Wilmott, "do you know me?"

"Why, have you forgotten Dick, my old servant, the most convenient rogue that ever brushed a coat or carried a billet-doux—Dick, who married Nancy?"

"Ay, I remember; and who is this man?"

"Pike, sir."

"What does he want with Rose?"

"He has a letter for her, I believe."

"Show him in," said Faddle; "we will see him here."

The order was given in too peremptory a tone to be disputed, and in a few moments the obsequious Dick, who felt that he was no longer master in his own house, if the cellar deserved such a name, returned, ushering in his old acquaintance Pike.

"New," said Wilmott, "you want to see my wife?"

"I do."

"For what purpose?"

"I have a letter for her."

"Give it to me."

"No, I shan't."

This was uttered with an air of such marked disrespect, that his old master felt stung to the quick, and fixing his eyes sternly upon him, asked him if he had forgotten him.

"Oh no," replied the man carelessly; "I know you well enough; you are my first master's son, Richard Wilmott, the bankrupt and spendthrift."

"And who are you?" demanded Wilmott, calmly; "a fellow whom my father took a starving orphan from the streets, fed, clothed, educated, made a man of. Whatever my follies or crimes, you, sir, ought to blush to stand covered before that father's son."

"I am sure," said the old man, moving his hat, "I did not mean to offend you; but I was told to give the letter into your wife's own hand."

"Who is it from?"

"My master, Walter Maynard."

"From him!" exclaimed Wilmott. "Give it me!"

"Perhaps he will require a little persuasion," said Faddle, drawing a clasp knife from his pocket, and opening the long blade.

"No, no," eagerly exclaimed the old man, "I want none of your persuasion. Here's the letter."

Wilmott took it mechanically, and said, with a bitterness he could ill conceal:

"So Walter Maynard is now your master?"

"Factory and fifty thousand pounds!" ejaculated Pike, maliciously. "To-morrow morning all will be his. I saw the money myself in the counting-house."

"In the counting-house?" said Faddle; and his eyes and Wilmott's met with a peculiar expression.

"Well," said the latter, "you have performed your errand. Leave me."

"Oh, I have no wish to intrude."

With these words the crabbed old man, who had never liked his young master, left the house, secretly pleased at the strait to which fortune had reduced him. No sooner had he left the cellars than Rose, who marked his departure, and recognised him, despite the change of years, approached the door leading to the inner room, and applied her ear to the keyhole. She remembered Faddle at a glance; and, in the impulse of terror and disgust, had drawn her shawl over her head to avoid recognition.

"Won't you read the letter?" demanded Faddle of his companion.

With a trembling hand the wretched man broke the seal. It contained a note for fifty pounds, and the following lines hastily traced. The broken characters, so different from Walter's usual clerkly steady hand, showed how deeply agitated he had been while penning them:—

"ROSE,

"My present happiness has not rendered me insensible to the welfare of one once so dear to me. Enclosed is a bill for fifty pounds. Use it wisely.

"Yours,

WALTER MAYNARD."

"Fifty pounds!" exclaimed Dick, with a whistle.

"Charity! charity! and from him!" groaned Wilmott.

"Fifty pounds!" whispered Faddle, crossing over to his dupe and letting his words fall like poison in his ear; "what is fifty pounds when thousands are within our reach?"

"What mean you?"

"You heard old Pike's boast just now?"

"I did."

"The money," said the tempter, slowly, as if he weighed every word he uttered, "is all in the counting-house, ready to be paid to the man who has taken your place, to-morrow."

"What then?" demanded Wilmott, unwilling to understand him.

"You know the premises."

"Every lock and bar are familiar to me."

"What should prevent us then from doing ourselves an act of justice and righting the wrongs of fortune? Fifty thousand pounds in a foreign land would be fortune enough for both of us."

"Ay; or, for the matter of that," added Dick, "for all three of us. You may stare—but it is time that I spoke out. I am weary of the life I lead in England. If you like to let me join you in this enterprise, well and good. You know you can rely on my fidelity."

"The fellow may be useful," whispered his old master to his companion. "Come, man, what say you? your fortunes are desperate. As for the fifty pounds you have received—what is the use of fifty pounds?—gone in a month or two."

"But this is theft!" exclaimed Wilmott; "mean, dishonourable theft!"

"*Is it worse than murder?*"

These words produced an electrical effect upon the still hesitating Wilmott, who remembered that every moment of his stay in England was pregnant with

danger. In his despair he looked upon robbery as an escape from the peril which menaced him.

"I am indeed a wretch!" he exclaimed; "so lost, that hope has no smile, and mercy cannot reach me. You are my evil genius, Faddle. Do with me as you will."

"You consent, then?"

"I do."

"Decided like a man!" exclaimed Faddle, "who has the pluck to stare Fortune in the face, and outfrown the wrinkled beldame. Come," he added, "your nerves are unsteady. Dick, get us a bottle of brandy and some cigars—it's a precious long time since I tasted the flavour of one."

"You, too, have been unfortunate, then?" observed Wilmott.

"I have been the very shuttlecock of fate—at one moment rolling in wealth, the next the inmate of a prison. My life, like Joseph's garment, has been of many colours; and here I am thrown back at the starting-post at last."

By this time Dick had returned with the brandy and a basket of provisions for supper, and busied himself in spreading the table, much to the dissatisfaction of his portly helpmate, whom the assurance that one of the strangers had just received fifty pounds alone kept quiet; for, like most of her sex, she was excessively curious, and not a little jealous of any secret in which she did not share.

As soon as the table was spread, Dick was sent to call Rose and the boy.

"My love," said Wilmott, mildly, "here is an old friend, against whom you had formerly some cause of complaint. Let it be forgotten now. Like myself, he has suffered for his errors, and atoned them."

"Not atoned them," interrupted Rose, bitterly. "The atonement is yet to come."

"What mean you?"

"Have you forgotten the old fortune-teller's prophecy?"

"What prophecy?" demanded Faddle, whose memory had entirely failed him on the subject.

"That you should be hanged for taking the life of a woman."

The countenance of the ruffian suddenly changed as Rose recalled the circumstance to his recollection.

The scene, although so many years had elapsed, was in an instant present before him—the old hag, with her cards on the table before him, and the two merry girls, Rose and Nancy, laughing at his rage at the woman's prediction.

"Pshaw!" he muttered. "I am not superstitious."

"It's a lie, Faddle," said Rose; "and you know it is a lie. Men without religion are always superstitious. What brings you back to England, but that iron hand which is conducting you to your doom? You cannot escape it, strive as you may."

"And what brings you back?" demanded Faddle, with a laugh.

"The same, perhaps," sighed Rose—"the same blind destiny."

"Come," interrupted Wilmott, "a truce to reproaches! See how sleepy the poor boy is. Give him some supper, Rose, and let him go to bed."

"He has, indeed, grown a fine fellow," observed Faddle, who was about to place his hand caressingly upon his head, when Rose impatiently dashed it aside.

"Don't touch him," she exclaimed, "lest it prove a curse. His heart is pure and innocent. I would as soon the fiend baptised him, as hand of yours be placed upon his head."

"Why, Rose, you are grown quite poetical!" said the ruffian, with a sneer; "does Wilmott share your sensibility?"

"At least," retorted Rose, "I share his confidence. Provoke me, ruffian, and I may find the means to fulfil the woman's prophecy, and hang you like a dog, though not for the *blood of a woman*."

"Whew!" thought Dick to himself, "if she knew the captain as well as I do, she would hardly have ventured on a threat like that."

Faddle, instead of flying out, as his friend and former servant expected, suddenly calmed down. He saw that misery had changed the character of the once gentle Rose; that she was no longer the timid girl, but the bold, determined woman, capable in her anger of braving every thing to gratify her revenge. Like an experienced tactitian he resolved to soothe her.

"Hear me, Rose," he said; "the time has been I should have answered you with scorn and defiance; but I am a changed man—misfortunes have humbled me—poverty has ground me to the earth. If the meeting of an old friend is distasteful to you, say the word, and after to-night we meet no more. But remember," he added, fixing upon her a glance of peculiar meaning, "you cannot involve me without destroying your husband—dishonouring the father of your boy."

"I know," sighed Rose, "the net has been artfully woven; but it may break at last."

"He will cut her throat before morning," thought Dick, "as sure as his name is Faddle;" but he wisely kept his thoughts to himself.

By the time supper was over, the wretched beings whom poverty had driven to seek a lodging in the cellars had, with the exception of the party in the mistress's room, retired to rest. There Faddle, Wilmott, Dick, and his wife, sat till a late hour, drinking brandy till they were ready for any thing. Although Rose refused to join them in their potations, she judged it best to remain, for she was determined that her husband should not quit the house that night, having overheard the plan of robbing the counting-house, and Walter Maynard's generous reply to the letter which, in her despair, she had written to him. She resolved, at all hazards, to prevent the crime.

"I think Rose suspects us," said Faddle, in a low voice, to Dick; "can't you contrive to get rid of her, to give us an opportunity of leaving the house?"

"I'll speak to my old woman; she will manage it."

Going into the bar, Dick made such a clattering amongst the bottles that it soon attracted the attention of his better-half, who, fearing her own peculiar store would be discovered, quickly left the room to look after him.

"What the devil are you doing here?" she demanded, with a growl.

"Silence, my love."

"But I won't be silent!"

"Well, then, damn you!" exclaimed the exasperated fellow, "yelp out, give tongue, and spoil the only chance you ever had of making a fortune."

"A *fortune!*" repeated the woman in a low tone.

"Ay, I thought that would bring you to your senses. All women love money."

"And if I do love it," replied the landlady, "you know it is only for you. But tell me all about it. I shan't peach," she added, with a laugh, "so long as you are in it."

"Well, then, the two coves in the inner ken were once rich gentlemen. I lived servant with one of them, and a fine time we had of it—racing, driving, rattling here, flying there. Ah!" he added, with a sigh, "I was a happy fellow then."

"And aint you happy now?" demanded the fury, with a scowl. "You ungrateful dog!"

"Of course, my love—of course I am. We kept the best of company—lords, baronets, and gentlemen—horses—and—hem!—every thing necessary for a fashionable establishment."

"And women too, no doubt," added the lady, with a pang of jealousy.

"Never mind that," said Dick, chucking her under her fat double chin.

"Cut on!"

"A plan is up that will make us. There is only one drawback."

"And what is that?" demanded his better-half.

"The woman. The money we are about to secure ought to be the poor gentleman's own; and he has offered me and the captain, as I call my old master, our thirds, if we help him to obtain it."

"And how much is it?"

"Fifty thousand pounds."

The woman opened her eyes wider than perhaps she had ever opened them before during the forty years she had been in the world. Fifty thousand pounds was to her something vast—vague—almost incomprehensible. She had a firmer faith in the existence of the pig-faced lady or the wandering Jew than in the reality of such a sum.

"Fifty thousand pounds!" she repeated.

"With my share of which," added her husband, "we may leave London, retire to the country, and live at our ease; or, if you would prefer it, take a public-house."

Dick had secretly resolved, in the event of the attempt proving successful, to show his better-half a clean pair of heels; for, like most men who sell themselves, he was heartily tired of his bargain. The hint about the public house was thrown in as a blind—he knew that it had been the ambition of the lady's life to be mistress of one.

"And what am I to do?" she demanded.

"Get the woman out of the way, under pretence of putting the child to bed, while we leave the house; and if she attempts to follow ——"

"I'll wring her neck first," whispered the hag. "Leave her to me. And now, Dick," she added, "since I am fly to your plan, you shall see how well I can act my part. You little know what a treasure you married in me. My first husband was a noted cracksman."

"Was he?" said Dick.

"Only he met with an accident early one morning."

"Hanged?"

"Unfortunately."

"Ah! that accounts for my never having heard him mentioned by her before," thought his successor to himself. Had he known that his affectionate wife had sold him to justice, and commenced business with the reward, he might have repented of his late confidence.

While this thought was passing through her husband's head, the lady unlocked a small drawer at the bottom of a chest, which stood in a closet near the bar, and took from it a crowbar and centrebit, of finely tempered steel; they had been the favourite implements of her late husband, and she kept them as relics.

"There's beauties!" she exclaimed, as she placed them in the hands of his successor.

"What are these for?" demanded the astonished Dick, who was quite new to the trade.

"What are they for!" repeated the woman, with a look of contempt at his ignorance; "well, that beats every thing I ever heard afore. What are they for? Why, a cracksman's stock in trade, you fool!"

"I see, I see—housebreaking tools; they may be useful."

"Of course they will be useful. Come," said the woman, "let us back to the ken, or the covea may take the alarm. Return here with the swag, Dick," she added, "and I'll see that you are not robbed out of your share."

"I shall leave that to you, darling," said her husband, with a smile.

"You may."

With these words the affectionate pair, who were mutually planning to betray each other, returned to the inner room, Dick bringing a bottle of gin in his hand by way of excuse.

"Why, *marm*," said the landlady, as soon as she was seated, "you don't take enough to wet the whistle of a sparrow. Try a little neat."

"Not a drop, I thank you," replied Rose.

"Well, then," added the woman, filling out a glass of gin, and offering it to the boy, "let the young one have it; it will do him good; he will sleep like a top after it. I always does—don't I, Dick?"

"Always, my love."

"No, no," eagerly interrupted Rose, at the same time drawing the boy, who was half asleep, to her bosom; "he is unused to drink, and will be better without it. It is rest—rest that he requires."

"Wife, are the beds ready?"

"Of course they are," said the landlady. "As you are friends of Dick, *marm*, I am not going to put you with the sixpenny and fourpenny varmints in the other cellar; but in a bed a queen might lie in; and there is a cot by the side that will just do for the young one."

At the extreme end of the room was a small door which opened into a recess fitted up as a chamber, with some degree of neatness, at any rate in comparison with the rest of the accommodations of the miserable place; for the walls were whitewashed, and the coverlid of the bed appeared clean, though common.

"Thanks!" said Rose, rousing up her son and leading him to the bed. "I shall not be a moment, Wilmott," she added; "he is all but asleep already."

No sooner had Rose entered the recess, than the landlady hastily closed the door and drew the bolt. She was a prisoner.

"Now then, away!" exclaimed the hag.

"Wilmott! Wilmott!" called Rose from the cell.

"Never mind her," said Faddle; "the opportunity may not occur again."

"You will not ill-use her!" exclaimed the bewildered husband, addressing the landlady.

"This way, sir," said Dick; "she will be safe enough till our return."

Persuaded by his two companions, Wilmott left the house, despite the frantic entreaties of his wife, whose shrieks, long after his departure, echoed through the low-arched cellars.

"Damn her!" muttered the harridan, alarmed at her cries, lest they should disturb the house; "I must silence her, or we shall have the police upon us and spoil all."

Taking up a sharp carving-knife from the table, she coolly tucked up her sleeves and undid the fastening of the door.

"What are you yelling in that way for?" demanded the landlady.

"Where is my husband?" inquired Rose.

"Out on business," replied the woman.

"Business!" repeated Rose; "I know the kind of business he is gone upon — robbery, and perhaps murder. I must after him!"

"No you don't," said the landlady, resolutely barring her passage; "we are not going to have a slap-up affair spoiled through your squeamishness. Take it quietly; it will be all the better for you."

"Who shall prevent me?"

"I will."

"Would you murder me?"

"Not unless I am obliged. I don't want to hurt a hair of your head; but if you force me," said the fury, "I would as soon cut your throat as look at you."

"Would you, Mother Hell-cat!" exclaimed a voice near her.

The landlady turned round, and found herself, to her astonishment, in the grasp of a tall Irishman, whose dress indicated that he had been a soldier. The poor fellow, it appeared, was one of the discharged Spanish Legion, who had been left to beg his bread about the streets by those who had engaged his services. He had heard Rose's cries for help, and suspecting something wrong, had left his bed to see fair play. Despite the desperate struggles of the landlady, he succeeded in disarming her, but not before she had twice wounded him in the arm.

"Thanks, thanks!" sobbed Rose, who, at the sight of blood, had sunk half-fainting into a chair; "are you much hurt?"

"Is it the scratch you mean?" said the fellow; "never dim your pretty eyes with a tear for that; sure I mind it no more than the bite of a wild cat, or any other kind of varmint. What can I do for you?"

"Protect my boy from this woman's fury, while I go and seek my husband."

"That's little enough. Be aisy now," he added, turning to his prisoner; "what's the use of resistance when the battle is lost?"

"Am I to be kept a prisoner in my own house?"

"House! cellar you mean," said the man, with a good-humoured smile; "but you English have always such fine names for every thing. By St. Patrick, but I have it!" he added, turning to Rose; "bring out the boy."

Rose, comprehending his design, hastily snatched her son from the bed, and brought him into the room in which the speaker was standing with his prisoner, who was violently struggling to get free.

"Don't make a fool of yourself," whispered the man to her. "You will only bring the police."

Despite her resistance, and laughing at her curses and threats, the soldier thrust her into the recess, in which Rose had so lately been confined, and drew the bolt upon her.

"Let me out! Murder!" roared the hag.

"Bother!" said the man. "And now, mistress, what can I do for you?"

"Is the outward door unfastened?"

"Faith, and it is."

"Protect my boy till I return," whispered Rose, passionately kissing her child, as if with a presentiment that she would never press him to her heart again; "and the blessings of a broken-hearted mother reward you for your generosity."

Without waiting for a reply, for she feared her courage would give way, the unhappy creature passed through the outward cellar, hastened up the steps, and in a few moments found herself in the street. To her the neighbourhood had been familiar from childhood; she knew every turn which led towards the factory, where, by this time, she doubted not, her husband and Faddle were already engaged in their work of robbery and blood. In her way, she had to cross a piece of waste land, from which several houses had been removed to make room for the improvements lately undertaken in the city. Here, to her terror, she encountered Dick and his master, who were waiting the return of Wilmott, whom they had sent to reconnoitre the premises previous to making the attempt.

"She here?" whispered Faddle to his companion, as soon as he saw her approach.

"Then Meg's a croaker!" said the astonished Dick, at a loss to imagine how any one could have escaped from the virago he called his wife.

"Now," demanded Rose, assuming a courage she was far from feeling, "where is my husband?"

"Writing a sonnet to your beauty, for aught I know," answered Faddle.

"Liar! He is gone to rob, perhaps to murder, his uncle and Walter. But mark me—unless you seek him instantly, and give over your infamous design, villain, this hand consigns you to the gallows."

"You talk it well!"

"Not more than I can perform, as you know."

"What is to be done?" whispered Dick.

"Leave her with me," replied his master, in the same low tone.

"You hesitate," said Rose.

"Not at all," replied Faddle, seizing her by the arm. "Your request is reasonable—most reasonable. Of course we will give up our design upon the factory—won't we, Dick?"

"Will you have my pistol?" said the latter to his companion.

"No—I have got my knife. Leave us together. No matter," resumed the former, at the same time placing it in his waistcoat pocket, "it may be useful."

"You won't hurt her?"

"No, damn you! be off!"

Dick waited for no further commands. Although a great rascal, he had a natural antipathy to the sight of blood, and hurried away to avoid it.

No sooner did Rose find herself alone with her ancient enemy than her courage left her. She read in his fierce glance the purpose of his heart. Her throat felt parched and burning, and her brain reeled with terror at her danger.

"Hear me," she said; "you know I cannot endanger you without betraying my husband. Release me, give up your design upon the factory, and I'll be silent."

"Oh, yes," said the ruffian, with a sneer, "you will be silent."

"What do you mean? You won't detain me?"

"No, I'll not detain you long," said Faddle, looking cautiously round to see if any one was approaching.

"I see!" shrieked the unhappy woman, half dead with terror. "I read your intention: you would murder me! For God's sake do not take my life! Think on my boy! I am not fit to die! Do not kill me! I never injured you!"

"'Tis false," whispered the ruffian. "I loved you, and you scorned me—withdrew your husband from my influence. Desire has withered with your beauty, but revenge remains."

Releasing his left hand from her arm, the speaker seized her by her long dark hair, and forcing her upon her knees, threw her head back so as to expose the throat to his knife, at which moment the eye of his victim rested on the pistol in his pocket.

"Assistance! ah! assistance!" she exclaimed.

"Where?" demanded the ruffian, turning suddenly round.

"Here, villain!" exclaimed Rose, "starting to her feet, and snatching the pistol from him, which, when he again confronted her, was levelled at his head. "Advance one step, and I fire!"

"You dare not."

"Trust not to that. I am alone, maddened by terror, desperate and resolved. I would not willingly have your blood upon my head, but if you lessen the distance between us a hair's breadth the bullet whistles through your brain! Fool! coward! villain!" she continued, her courage and excitement every moment increasing, "I yet shall see the doom foretold—the gibbet! Ha! ha! ha! the gibbet!"

Still keeping the weapon levelled towards him, Rose sprang lightly over the rubbish which encumbered the ground, and disappeared down one of the narrow lanes which led towards the factory, leaving Faddle overwhelmed with rage and confusion.

"Well, is it done?" said Dick, who returned to the spot, thinking all would be over.

"No, it's not done. Why did you leave your pistol? I told you I had my knife. Baffled!" he added; "baffled, and by a woman!"

"You are not the first," said his companion, drily, "who has been baffled by a woman. Where is she gone to?"

"No matter!" exclaimed Faddle, recovering himself with a violent effort; "one bold struggle may remedy all. Dick, will you stick to me?"

"To the death, sir."

"Even if I wish to get rid of Wilmott?"

"He was always a poor drivelling fellow, sir, without a jot of resolution," replied the fellow, "and you are not more anxious to get rid of him than I to separate from my wife."

"In that case," said his old master, "follow me. The prize for which we contend is no ordinary one. Let your resolution be as firm as your fortune is desperate, and we shall succeed; my courage is certain not to fail me."

"Nor mine," added Dick; "I have so long been henpecked by that termigant at home, that to avoid her I would take Satan by the horns and try a throw with him."

Mr. Briarton, like most men in business, was a most orderly and methodical person. Although he was determined on the morning to give up, not only the concern, but the greater part of his fortune, to his son-in-law, he resolved to sit up and go over the accounts as usual, that his successor might not find a difficulty to encounter in taking the concern in his own hand. For this purpose he bade the young couple, who had just returned from their wedding excursion, good night, and retired to his private office in the house. One of the overseers and the packers were busy in the factory making up the bales which were to start by the canal in the morning for the country. Mr. Briarton's office was a small room parted off from the entrance hall of the mansion by glass windows, and was only big enough to contain a large iron safe, a desk, and chairs for two or three. A small window at the back looked into the yard, and enabled the owner to cast an eye upon the proceedings of the men. Close to this window was the rope attached to the factory bell.

"Heigho!" sighed the old man; "how many changes have I seen since I and my poor brother-in-law first took our seats as youths in this office—for we were little more—when, with trusting hearts and slender capital, we commenced business together! I little thought," he added, "that I should have resigned the concern our joint industry made flourish to any but his son. Poor Dick! Well, well, it is too late to think of that now. I have made up the accounts. I leave my successor a clear set of books and a clean conscience. Thank heaven, I can lay my hand upon my heart and say that not one shilling of my large fortune has been gained by oppressing the poor man, or conduct unworthy of an honest one."

The speaker, with a lingering regret, delayed retiring from the little spot where he had made the fortune of which he was so justly proud, and passed the happiest hours of his life; for he had been, heart and soul, devoted to business. There he remained nodding in his chair, dozing over the past, and indulging in dreams for the future. His child—his darling Ellen—was married to a man on whose integrity he could stake his life—one who owed every thing to his bounty and favour; and he felt that, let death come when it would, he should leave her in the arms of one who would prove worthy of the trust reposed in him.

His mind thus at ease respecting the future, the old gentleman gradually fell asleep in his easy chair, leaving the key in the iron safe beside him. He had not been long in this state of oblivion, when an arm was introduced through the fanlight above the door, and the upper bolt carefully withdrawn. Then there was a pause in the proceeding, as if those without waited to listen to the result of their daring. After awhile the door was slowly opened, and Wilmott, Faddle, and Dick entered the hall with slow and stealthy footsteps.

"Here we are," whispered Faddle; "and there," he added, pointing to the counting-house, "is the money. Don't let us lose time. Why, what ails the man?" he added, seeing that his companion was overwhelmed with grief and shame.

"Nothing," said Wilmott, "nothing—only——"

"Only what?" impatiently demanded his destroyer.

"In this house was I born; that staircase leads to my mother's chamber. There I have seen my father sit a thousand times," he added, pointing to the counting-house. "Oh! could they see me now a dishonoured felon!"

"Pshaw! Dick, creep out to the yard; there are lights in the factory; if any one approaches give the signal. And look ye," continued his master, "show but the tip of the white feather, and I'll send a bullet through your brain."

He cocked the fellow pistol which he had taken from Dick after the flight of Rose, and pointed it most significantly as he spoke.

"Trust to me," said the fellow; "I am true as steel."

While Wilmott remained absorbed in his recollections and regrets, looking round, Faddle crept cautiously towards the glass partition which separated the counting-house from the hall, and saw, to his astonishment, Mr. Briarton fast asleep in his chair. This was a difficulty he had not calculated upon, and he regretted that he had not set Wilmott to watch instead of Dick. He foresaw that the nephew would never be brought to use violence against his uncle.

"The old man has fallen asleep in the counting-house," he whispered.

"God bless him!" said Wilmott, bursting into tears; "let me look on him once more."

"Fool!" said the ruffian; "is this a time for such feelings and regrets? Remember that unless we succeed to night, to-morrow we are beggars."

"True, true."

"The money is beside him."

"Let us take it and fly, then," said Wilmott; "but not all—no, not all!"

"But should he wake?"

"You will spare him!" interrupted the wretched man, whose better feelings had returned at the sight of his boyhood's home; "you will spare him! Hear me, Faddle: I have borne much, committed many crimes; but for all that I have lost I would not have that old man's blood upon my soul."

"Pshaw! what difference does a drop or two, more or less, make? I am resolved to live happily if I can, but at all events to live free. If he wakes he dies!"

"No, no!" said Wilmott. And they crept stealthily towards the counting-house.

Fortune at first seemed willing to spare the overburdened souls of the two men the weight of further crime, for Mr. Briarton continued to sleep while they opened the door and crept towards the iron safe, which Faddle began greedily to ransack, cramming both gold, notes, and bills, into his pockets. During the robbery, a pale face might be seen placed against the outward window—it was Rose, who, as well ac-

quainted as any one of them with the premises, had followed them unperceived. In one hand she held the rope of the factory bell, ready, on the first appearance of danger, to ring an alarm, which she knew would bring the overseers and packers from the factory —in the other the pistol which she had snatched from her intended assassin. Her heart turned sick as she saw the father of her boy engaged in robbing the relative whom he had too deeply injured already.

"I have got it all," whispered Faddle.

"Thank God!" thought Wilmott, more intent upon his uncle than the plunder, "the old man sleeps! Further crime, at least, is spared me!"

In this reflection he was mistaken, for in turning round he knocked against one of the books, which, falling from the desk upon the floor, startled Mr. Briarton from his slumber.

"Thieves! thieves! Help!" exclaimed the old man.

Faddle's first impulse was to shoot him, but knowing it would alarm the house, he drew his knife, and began opening it with his teeth; just as he had accomplished it, to his terror and confusion the factory bell sent forth a heavy peal.

"Murder! thieves!" continued the old man, springing upon his nephew, who was half stupefied, and totally unprepared to meet him.

Faddle's eye glanced at the window, and caught sight of Rose, who was still pulling at the bell.

"For revenge!" he cried, as he levelled and fired.

A loud shriek told that the ball had taken effect, and voices were heard both in the factory and the rooms above. Springing through the window, the murderer disappeared, leaving his companion in the hands of his uncle.

When Walter Maynard, the overseers, and men entered the counting-house, they found an unresisting maniac in the grasp of his uncle, who, as yet, had not recognised him.

"Good heavens! sir, what is the matter?"

"Plundered — robbed!" said the old gentleman. "But here is one of the thieves."

"And don't you know who it is?" demanded Pike, addressing him.

"I?—no," said his master.

"Your own nephew—Richard Wilmott.

"God!" said the unhappy Mr. Briarton, "and is it come to this?—a robber! a felon! Oh, Dick! Dick!"

In the confusion which ensued, it was some time before any one thought of dispatching parties to overtake the plunderer, who had thus several minutes, of which he was not slow to avail himself, to effect his escape. On reaching the factory-yard some of the men found the unhappy Rose, who had fainted from loss of blood. Her hand still grasped the rope of the bell by which she had given the alarm. Thinking she was dead, they bore her into the house. If Walter Maynard had failed to recognise Wilmott, he did not make the same error respecting his wife. He knew the object of his former love at a glance, faded and changed as misery and want had made her. A sickness came over his heart—he longed to press her to it, bless and forgive her. Medical aid was instantly sent for, it being evident to all that the devoted woman had lost her life through the act which had preserved Mr. Briarton's. In the regret and sorrow of the moment, the loss of the large sum taken by Faddle was scarcely thought of or regretted.

As soon as the surgeon arrived and examined the wound he shook his head.

"Is there no hope?" demanded Walter.

"None; the ball has traversed the lungs; in a few hours all will be over."

Without a word her former lover raised the insensible Rose in his arms and bore her to a chamber. Then placing her upon a bed, he left her while the surgeon dressed her wound and administered some restorative medicines. From the chamber of Rose he passed to that of his wife.

Some women, in Ellen's place, would have pouted and been dissatisfied at the attention lavished upon one who had deprived her of the lover of her youth, and retained, perhaps, no inconsiderable hold over the heart of her husband; but Mrs. Maynard was no common-minded person; she remembered that to the devotion of the dying Rose she was indebted for the life of her father, and perhaps for Walter's. Meeting him, therefore, with a tearful smile, she extended her hand to him, exclaiming:

"You have acted rightly, very rightly, Walter Can we do nothing for her?"

That one noble act won her the affection of her husband more firmly than ever.

"Nothing," he sighed; "there is no hope; she is dying."

When Walter entered the room where the dying woman was waiting to receive him, he found her calm and collected—without one regret for herself. A faint smile even played upon her thin lips as she beheld the only man she had ever really loved, overwhelmed with grief, approach her couch of suffering.

"His rich wife," she thought, "has not all his heart; the wretched Rose is remembered still!" and there was consolation in the thought.

"Walter!" she faltered, "my boy! my son!"

"Shall be to me as my own, dear Rose. Where is he?"

She murmured the name of the street in which the wretched den was situated whore she had left him, and Pike, with a couple of policemen, was immediately dispatched to bring him to her presence.

"I shall die in peace," she murmured, "if I leave him in your care. Oh, Walter! a life of misery and a broken heart have well avenged you on the perjured Rose. Your curse has reached me."

"Forget it," sobbed Walter, overcome with his grief; "it is recalled—has been long since. Alas! what portion of the fault was mine! I doubted when I should most have trusted."

"No, no! the fault has been my own—all my own!"

"Who was my nephew's companion in his vile attempt?" demanded Mr. Briarton, as he entered the apartment.

"The man who, through life, has been his ruin, his destroyer, and my murderer."

"Faddle?"

"Even that villain."

The old gentleman left the room to give directions for his apprehension. The loss of the money, although great, was not so ruinous as it at first appeared, since more than half of the sum was in bills which could be stopped at the bank, should the robber attempt to negotiate them.

"Walter," said Rose, "it is sweet to die thus. I have suffered much, and Heaven is so merciful, I feel almost assured it will at last forgive me. Could I but once more embrace my poor, neglected boy——"

Here the feelings of the mother overcame her, and she wept bitterly.

"I will rear him like my own."

"Train him to honest industry," replied the expiring woman; "and Walter, you remember the old churchyard, where—in other, happier days—we used to sit together? Bury me there—no stone to mark the spot. Shed one kind tear upon your poor girl's grave, and Rose, the broken-hearted Rose, will die content. You will not forget me, Walter?"

"Forget you!" exclaimed the unhappy man; "Rose, there has not been a day of my life, since the hour which separated us, in which you have not been remembered. 'Tis true that Fortune has smiled upon me, but I have not been happy. I am the husband of an angel, but she was not the love of my boyhood, the first choice of my heart. Man may forget the mother who bore him in her womb, the wife upon whose bosom his head has lain, but not the form which first crossed his youthful fancy—the dream of his young heart; they are graven there before the impress of any other image; death only can efface them."

"True," said Rose; "at this hour I feel 'tis true. But leave me, Walter," she added; "you must leave me. We have no right to trifle with the happiness of others, even though we rashly destroy our own. Ellen ——"

"Knows and approves my conduct. Long ere we were united every feeling was laid open to her. Think you I could deceive the generous woman who made me what I am?"

"Then you will love her?—not perhaps with the devotion of a first affection, but the better, purer love which springs from a knowledge of her virtues. She need not envy me, Walter," she added, "these last few moments—the only ones of happiness I have known for years."

"She will not," replied the mourner, stooping over her to imprint a last kiss, for he saw that she was sinking fast.

Rose perceived his intention, and a faint flush suffused her pale cheek as she put forth her hand to prevent him.

"When I am dead, Walter," she murmured, "when I am dead. Ellen will not be jealous then. The worm will press them next."

Walter understood her delicacy, and contented himself with imprinting the kiss upon her hand which trembled as it felt the contact of his lips.

Soon afterwards Pike arrived with the boy, whom he found in the care of the faithful Irishman, who, true to his word, had guarded him, resisting the threats and entreaties of the infuriated landlady of the lodging-house to release her from her temporary prison. No sooner did the poor boy behold the pale features and blood-stained couch of his mother than he burst into an agony of grief, and clung to her with the passionate love of childhood for the only being who had ever treated him with kindness or affection. Rose clasped him to her breast with the unspeakable tenderness of a dying mother's love. The parting between parent and child was too solemn for affection even like Walter's to intrude upon, and he left the room, that they might indulge in their grief alone.

When he returned he found Rose much weaker; she was evidently sinking fast. With a smile she placed the hand of her weeping boy in Walter's, and bade him look to him as a father.

"And may Heaven so smile upon me as I prove one to him!"

A look of gratitude was all the dying mother could offer in return.

At this moment Ellen, followed by the clergyman of the parish, entered the room. With a woman's tact, she felt that her presence would be a consolation to the sufferer, and she resolved not to withhold it.

"Can you forgive me?" demanded Rose.

"Freely," replied Mrs. Maynard.

"Then I die happy. Oh, Walter, do not forget me! In your hours of happiness cast one kind thought upon your poor girl's grave; and if, in the world to which I hasten, the dead are permitted to watch over those they loved on earth, my spirit will be near you then! Raise me—raise me—the blood seems choking me!"

Walter stooped down, and placing his arms under her form, endeavoured to raise her, but let fall his burden when he saw the change which came over her.

"When I am dead, Walter—when I am dead!"

Her spirit fled with the words, which her former lover alone understood. Ellen took the screaming child from the room in her arms, and the clergyman began reciting the prayers for the dying.

When they laid the body out for interment, they found a small locket attached to a black ribbon, which the poor creature had for many years worn round her neck. It contained a lock of Walter's hair. By Ellen's directions it was buried with her. The morning before the coffin was screwed down, poor Walter went into the room by himself to take a last farewell of her he had loved so truly, and to whose motherless boy he had promised to act as a parent. Then it was that he took the last kiss of his early love. It was imprinted upon the lips of the dead, and was as pure as the sorrow of the mourner was deep and sincere.

Possessed of the wealth for which he had risked so much, Faddle and Dick, who closely followed at his heels, made the best of their way from the factory and the neighbourhood of their crime, nor drew breath till they reached Fleet Street, where they took a cab, and drove towards St. James's Park, from whence they dived into one of the narrow, wretched streets in the neighbourhood of Westminster, if possible to seek for a lodging at that early hour of the morning; for the weather was extremely cold, and Faddle was so thinly clad that his very blood seemed frozen.

"You will not betray me?" he muttered to his companion. "Remember, if you do, that you swing with me—you are as deep in the affair as I am."

"I betray you!—certainly not," said Dick, trying to look unembarrassed. "Why should I betray you? Aint I in the same boat as yourself?"

"There may be a reward offered," said Faddle, fixing his eye upon him.

"Which would not amount to half the swag," said Dick, who suddenly assumed a very independent sort of tone with his former master, whom he felt he now had completely in his power. Not that he absolutely contemplated treachery, only he felt a pleasurable excitement in the fact — something like a cat with a mouse between its paws, who toys with its victim, conscious that it can at any time devour it.

Dick, from having been in the line, knew that most of the low lodging-house keepers had beds which they let at a price that would be thought extravagant in any hotel, although the accommodation was very little superior to that provided for their ordinary customers; but then there was conceal-

ment as well as lodging, and the former was the thing really paid for. One of these houses in the Almonry, now happily pnlled down, was kept by a Scotchman named Forbes, a shrewd, keen-witted fellow, ready to turn a penny by any thing that fell in his way. Dick had some slight knowledge of the man, and to his house guided his companion.

"Well, Dnneen Forbes," he whispered, as soon as they had gained admittance, "is the green chamber disengaged?"

"Troth is it!"

"Are you willing to let it to this gentleman?"

"Troth am I! And he is willing to pay for it?"

"I will answer for that. Send us in something to eat, and a bottle of brandy. And hark ye—if any one should inquire for us, we are neither of us at home. You understand?"

The Scot replied by a knowing wink, and leading the fugitives to his own chamber, carefully locked the door.

"Is this the room?" demanded Faddle, looking round him.

"This?—Lord help you!—no!"

The landlord of the lodging-house, assisted by Dick, drew the bed a sufficient distance from the wall to enable a person to pass between it and the tester. Taking up a candle, he led the way, and they followed him till they came to a low cupboard door, which their conductor carefully unlocked; it was so low that they were obliged to crawl in upon their hands and knees. As soon as the Scot arrived at the end of the recess, which, to ordinary inspection, appeared only a sort of closet, he touched a spring at the back, which gave way, and admitted them into a narrow room, about eight feet square, with a bed in a recess on either side. This was the green room Dick had inquired for.

No sooner were Dick and his old master left alone, than they threw themselves on their beds—if the dark, unhealthy dens might be called so—at the extreme end of the chamber. Fatigued and worn as they were, neither dared to sleep, for they each mistrusted the other. So they remained, like two beasts of prey, watching one another's movements; and although their eyes were heavy, and their temples throbbed with the deep pulsations of their overwrought brain, sleep, which hovered wooingly round them, was kept at a distance by doubt and terror. There may be companionship, but there is no confidence in mutual guilt. In this state they remained, their bloodshot eyes watching each other's movements till the lamp expired, leaving them in darkness so profound that not a shadow could be traced: it was the blindness of night which enveloped them. After laying for some time, reflecting on what was to be done, Faddle began to draw off his boots; he felt that he should not be able much longer to resist the approach of sleep, and he determined, if possible, to sleep securely. Cautiously as he accomplished this, Dick, whose sense of hearing was sharpened by darkness and the intense anxiety with which he watched, perceived that something—he knew not exactly what—was going on, and called out in his alarm to his former master:

"I trust, sir, you do not mean to play me false?"

"What should I gain by that?"

This, certainly, was the most sensible way of replying to Dick's inquiry, for the speaker well knew that his companion estimated his oaths and protestations at their just value.

"Not much, truly," replied the man, "for without me escape will be impossible. Who was the woman you shot? I heard the report of your pistol, and saw her fall."

"Rose," replied Faddle, quietly.

"Rose!" repeated Dick, with a pang of remorse; "poor Rose! what a fatality seems to have attended the two prettiest girls in Wilmott's factory! Nancy, I have heard, was murdered."

"Don't speak of Nancy!" interrupted Faddle, in a voice of deep emotion.

"Why not?"

"Curse you! don't speak of her! You know how fond I was of the girl. I loved her though she left me, and can't bear to hear her named. She deserved a better fate."

"Why did you not make it so, then?"

"I!" repeated the murderer in a tone of surprise, for he thought the speaker alluded to her death; "what the devil had I to do with it? I was in France when she died."

"Possibly."

"Truly. What do you mean to insinuate? Do you suppose that I——"

"I insinuate nothing, sir," interrupted Dick, who did not wish the suspicion to which their conversation had given birth should be too plainly expressed, "as you say you were in France. I wish we were both there at this moment."

"And I with all my heart."

During this conversation, Faddle had contrived to creep from the bed, at the foot of which he crouched like a cat—all fours—ready to pounce upon his victim, Judging of the situation of Dick's bed from the direction of his voice, he cautiously crept towards it, holding his knife between his teeth, ready for use. His suspicions were so completely roused, that he determined to quiet them by murdering his accomplice, and to trust to the gold and notes in his possession to bribe the landlord of the lodging-house to silence. Dick felt uneasy at the stillness, and with a view of ascertaining whether Faddle really slept, or had quitted his resting-place, slid from his, and began about the same time to creep cautiously over the floor of the apartment. In their way they encountered in the middle of the room—Faddle's head struck against the shoulder of his former servant.

"Traitor!" exclaimed Faddle, "I thought I heard you."

"Murder!" shrieked Dick, as his hand instinctively caught the blade of the knife which his assailant aimed at his breast. "Would you kill me? What have I done? Help! murder! murder!"

Faddle knew that it was no use to hesitate; he had advanced too far for that. Without the least feeling of remorse he drew the blade through the fingers of the shrieking wretch who called to him for mercy, and struck with it at random. Fortunately, the landlord, alarmed by their cries, entered the room with a light. Accustomed even as he was to scenes of crime, the Scot started back when he beheld Dick, whom he had known some time, with his fingers half-severed from his hand, and, with a desperate wound on his cheek, struggling and rolling with Faddle on the floor, who endeavoured to release his hand from the grip of his victim, who had caught it with his teeth. Not wishing to encounter the inconvenience of a murder in his house, especially in the secret chamber, which at times was more profitable to him than the rest of his lodgings put together,

his first care was to separate them, which, being a powerful man, he easily accomplished. Seizing Faddle's wrist, he wrenched the knife from his grasp, coolly put it in his pocket, and then, to use a sporting phrase, "cheked" Dick off.

"Wha ever saw twa sic damned fules!" he exclaimed; "fighting like twa drunken gillies, when ye should be as silent as death! Do ye think the walls are as thick as the castle of Edinbro', that ye canna be heard o' the ontside?"

"He would have murdered me," said Faddle.

"What with?" demanded Dick, "since I have neither weapon nor means. 'Tis you would have murdered me. I heard you creeping like a panther along the floor, and I crept from my bed to avoid you. Bnt I have had enough of yonr society. Do your best or your worst, I'll leave you. I was an honest lad when I first went to live with you; you first taught me to be a rogue, and then threatened me for being what you had made me."

"Yon forget," said Faddle, "that I can hang you."

"No I don't, nor that I can retnrn the compliment at any time. Murder is as good a qnalification for the gallows, at any time, as forgery. Duncan," he added, turning to the landlord, "let me out. Whatever be the consequences, I'll stay no longer here to be butchered in cold blood by a heartless villain."

"Hoot, hoot!" said the Scot; "it was all a mistake, perhaps."

"Mistake or not, let me ont."

The man hesitated, and seemed to look to Faddle for directions. The ruffian at once understood him, and dashed between Dick and the low door leading to the landlord's room, the only means of egress from the chamber.

"Hear me," he cried. "I am rich; no matter how obtained, I am rich. It is enough for you to know that I can pay for service. Assist me to dispose of that coward, who would betray me, and fifty sovereigns are yours."

It was not often that the landlord had an opportunity of making such a sum. The offer was too tempting to be refused. Without a word, the Scot quietly seized the trembling Dick, and throwing him across his knees, pinioned him as easily as a poulterer

would have trussed a fowl. Faddle's eyes glared with savage triumph when he beheld his accomplice so completely in his power.

"Give me my knife," he said, addressing himself to the Scot.

"What for?" coolly demanded the landlord, who had it in his pocket.

"To silence his babbling tongue for ever."

Here Dick, not doubting but that his last hour was at hand, set up so fearful a cry, that his captor almost felt tempted to comply with the ruffian's demand, and let him cut his throat at once in order to silence him; but second thoughts restrained him: first, as a prudent man, he had an aversion to unnecessary crime, and was not naturally cruel; his only vice was that gentlemanly one called avarice. Placing his huge palm over his prisoner's mouth, he quickly silenced his cries, for he stopped both them and his breath almost together.

"I canna do that," he said, in reply to Faddle's request for his knife; "I am a respectable man, and canna consent to murder—at least not for fifty pounds. Consider the reputation of my house, man, and the risk I'd run."

"A hundred," added Faddle.

"Don't tempt me," said the Scot, evidently struggling internally with the inducement of a hundred sovereigns, a larger sum than he had ever possessed at one time in his life; "but though I will not take—or suffer you to take—the skreeking fule's life, I'll take care he does not betray either you or me. I'll keep him prisoner."

"Where?"

"In a little room I have at the back of the loft."

"But he may escape?"

"An he does I'll forgive him. Bless you, man, I was not a mason sixteen years for nothing. The Tower of London would not keep him safer than Duncan's Cage—that's what I call my lock-up at the top of the house."

Fearful lest his cries should be repeated, the speaker took a dirty handkerchief from his pocket, the very sight of which nearly made Dick sick, and rolling it into a round ball, stuffed it into his prisoner's mouth. In vain his stomach yearned with loathing—he could neither eject it nor cry out.

"That's canny," said the Scot, eyeing his work with admiration; "worth all the gags in London Now, then, help me, captain, since I find such is your quality, to take him up stairs. But mark me," he added, "no foul play to the lad. I'll keep him a prisoner as long as you please—that is, as long as you choose to pay for it; but no blood—not a drop of blood. Stay, let me see that the coast is clear."

"You had better leave me my knife?" repeated Faddle, who was anxious to remove the only witness that could, as he thought, identify him with the murder.

"I tell you no!" said the man, sternly; "and I don't often break my word, and while I am away you had better not attempt. If I find a hair of his head hurt on my return, I'll crack your loins over my knee with as little regret as I would the ribs of a mad dog. Whatever else I may wink at, I'll keep my neck out of the hangman's noose; so don't try it, if you are wise."

The fellow crept through the passage, leaving Faddle to curse the necessity which compelled him to submit to the caprice of a ruffian who seemed even yet more cool-headed and determined than himself.

In about half-an-hour the landlord returned. Despite the rain, which was falling in torrents, he had relentlessly turned all his lodgers, although the hour was early, into the streets, and locked the door of his den, of which, with the exception of the two fugitives, he remained the only inmate.

"So," he said, "you have observed my caution?"

"Not through fear," said Faddle, willing to impress him with the idea that he was not alarmed at his superior strength and muscle.

The landlord only smiled; in his way he had read the world as closely as the speaker, and was not easily deceived. Seizing poor Dick by the collar, he quietly dragged him through the passage into his own room, and from thence, by means of a step-ladder, into a sort of den, not much larger than a sentry-box, built against the stack of chimneys which rose through the false roof of the house.

"I think he will be safe there," he muttered, after he had bolted the door on the outside, and was descending the ladder. "That is better than murder, captain."

"Perhaps it is," replied Faddle, who began to admire the fellow's coolness and courage. "I wish I knew whether I could trust you."

"That's a foolish question," observed the Scot, with a broad grin upon his features.

"How so?" demanded the murderer.

"*You must trust me;* and that you may do so securely, make it worth my while. Interest in this world is the best guard to fidelity. I would not give a curse for any other."

"Nor I."

"Let us on then to your chamber, and talk matters over," said the Scot. "You'll find I am not the fellow to take more than a fair advantage of a gentleman in difficulties who requires my assistance 'Live and let live' is my motto. But, no doubt, as you have perceived," he added, falling into his northern accent, "*live* comes first."

No sooner were the landlord of the lodging-house and Faddle seated in the secret chamber occupied by the latter, than they eyed each other much with the air of two Jews about to commence a bargain, or two Indians preparing to fight. The murderer read in the deep-set eye, overhanging brow, and high cheekbones of the Scot, something more than the usual cunning of his nation. There was dogged determination and caution to excess. He seemed to regard his lodger as a broker does a piece of furniture, when he is calculating how much he can make by the sale of it.

"Well," said Faddle, "you expect to be paid for the service you have rendered me?"

"Do you think I am a fool, to risk my liberty, perhaps for nothing? Of course I do!"

"How much?"

"The fifty pounds you named. You see I'll not haggle with you; you fixed the sum yourself. Then there is for your lodging, and the poor fellow's up stairs, twenty pounds per week beside. Let me have a hundred pounds on account," he added; "the rest will come in for board."

"Not a shilling!" exclaimed Faddle, coolly. "Do you think I am one of those simple gulls who risk their lives for gain, and spend all they get for safety? Not a whit of it. And yet it will be your own fault if we do not agree."

"How so?" demanded the Scot, doggedly.

"I'll tell you how. Procure me a disguise—perhaps that of a clergyman would be the best—a passport;

and arrange with some smuggling vessel—you will find plenty of them in the Thames—to take me over to France. Do this, and when the anchor is raised, and I am safe on board, I'll give you two thousand pounds."

"Two thousand pounds!" repeated the man, his eyes sparkling with cupidity; "it is the Bank of England, then, that you have robbed."

"No matter who or where, so you get your reward."

"True," said the philosophical Scot; "and I've but one objection to your proposition."

"And what is that?"

"That I have no money to carry out your plan with; the few pounds I possess are in the savings' bank, and it would require a fortnight's notice, even if I felt disposed to risk them, to get them out. So you see, under any circumstances, you must advance the funds to carry out your escape."

In confirmation of the truth of what he advanced, the fellow thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out a dirty blue-covered book, which he handed to his lodger; it was his account at the savings' bank, through which he had regularly invested his savings, till they had reached a considerable sum; the last payment was dated only three days back.

"How much must I advance?" said Faddle, with a sigh.

"As I told you at first, a hundred pounds; I will ask no more till you are on board a ship."

"Agreed."

The money was paid partly in gold and partly in notes, and the canny Scot left the room to procure something in the shape of refreshment for his profitable guest.

"It is a rare bird," he muttered with a chuckle, as he thrust the money into his pocket, "who moults such feathers as these; when the plumage is done, the carcase may be worth the picking. France—bah! it's my opinion he'll not see France in a hurry. I am too good a patriot to let such a customer out of my ain market."

The morning after Rose's death, handbills were placarded all over the metropolis, headed "Robbery and murder—one thousand pounds reward." In them a description was given of the assassin's person, a list of many of the notes stolen, and the promise of a pardon to any accomplice who might deliver him to justice. The Scot read the bill, one having been posted near to his den in the Almonry; the large amount stolen, fifty thousand pounds, excited his indignation—not for the loss of the rightful owner, but at the smallness of the share likely to come to him.

"Damn him!" he muttered; "two thousand pounds out of fifty. The fellow would out-sell a Jew or bargain with a Scot! No, no," he added, "I must have half—half or nothing. Two thousand pounds!" he repeated; "I'll see him damned first. Why, I can get half the sum, and run no risk; nay, he thanked into the bargain. We shall see—I must do nothing in a hurry—let me see."

Full of these reflections, he walked into a neighbouring public-house, called for a glass of gin and the morning paper, in which he read an account of the robbery at length, as well as of the murder of poor Rose. Before he went home, he stepped into a newsvender's, and bought a copy of the "Times;" the first time, perhaps, he had ever been guilty of such an extravagance in his life.

"There is your breakfast," he said, about an hour afterwards, as he crept into his lodger's hiding-place, and put some cold meat, bread, and a bottle of brandy before him; "and there is something to give it a relish."

He threw down the newspaper as he spoke.

Although half fainting with exhaustion and agitation, Faddle, before putting a morsel to his lips, eagerly perused the journal. Rose, it seemed, had recognised him. Not only his name was given, but a full description of his person. No sooner had he read it than he saw that he must increase his offer. He was not a man to balance where his safety was concerned.

"They are quick upon me," he observed, laying down the paper.

"Devilish quick!" was the reply.

"Since they have offered a thousand pounds, I must not be outdone in liberality," continued Faddle. "Assist me to baffle the bloodhounds, and instead of two you shall have ten thousand."

"Ten!" repeated the Scot, in a tone of contempt. "Well, the meanness of you English!"

"In the name of ten thousand devils," demanded the fugitive, "how much would you have?"

"Half—and little enough too. Many a man in my place would secure it all. But I have a conscience, if you have not."

"Half!" repeated Faddle.

"Half or none," replied the landlord, in a dogged tone; "and it's my private opinion I should be a loser by the bargain."

How a man could be a loser by putting twenty-five thousand pounds into his pocket, well as the assassin thought he knew the world, would have puzzled him to explain. He began to feel indignant at the exacting spirit of the Scot, and had he been armed, would have soon settled the account between them; as it was, he was compelled to be calm. He merely observed that he could not see how he could by any possibility be made a loser.

"I'll show," said the Scot, with a grin. "First, there's the thousand pounds reward."

"Granted."

"Then there's the showing of the house in which you were taken—full particulars given by the man that captured you—for the first month to gentry only, at half-a-crown a head. At a very moderate calculation I should make twelve hundred a week by that."

Faddle winced.

"Say it's six weeks before you are tried and hanged—that would make seven thousand two hundred pounds more."

Faddle was silent.

"But that would be nothing," continued the speaker, "to the harvest I should reap after your execution. The theatres might shut up — my house would empty theirs; and when I had done with it, I should find plenty to purchase the good-will. When I reflect, I am ashamed of my folly in making such an offer. But as I am a man of my word," he added, "I'll not flinch from it, although I have not counted the certain loss of getting the notes discounted—twenty-five per cent at least."

The assassin was so completely cowed by the horrible calculation of the speaker, that he had not a word to object. His spirit was quite gone. Justice at last seemed to have reached him.

"Say no more," he faintly gasped. "You shall have half."

"I knew I should," thought the Scot, with a quiet chuckle to himself, "I knew I should."

For the rest of the day Faddle was left to himself in his lonely chamber, to reflect on his position, and the dangers which surrounded him. At times he bitterly regretted the imprudence which had placed him in the power of his avaricious host, on whose fidelity his only chance of escape depended. The recollection of the old woman's prediction that he should be hanged for the murder of a woman flashed disagreeably upon him, and he cursed his fate, and the impetuosity of those passions which had so steeped his soul in crime, that he saw little hope either for this world or in the next.

But if Faddle's position was thus wretched, that of his accomplice, Dick, was still worse. Wounded, and a prisoner in a den which neither permitted him to lie down to rest his weary limbs, or scarcely to change his position, it was in vain that he tried to sleep. The pain of half-severed fingers and the uneasy position in which he was compelled to remain prevented him. He was afraid to call for assistance, for fear of being heard by the ferocious Scot, who, with all his objections to take life, would soon have stifled his voice in his iron gripe, had it threatened to compromise him. Food had twice been silently thrust into his cage, in which he was all but stifled for want of air and exercise.

The only means of ventilation was a small iron grating which opened into the chimney of the neighbouring house, and which admitted as much smoke as air into the species of den in which the prisoner was confined. The third day of his imprisonment, Dick, whose sufferings from his swollen limbs and wounded hands rendered him almost desperate of consequences, heard a noise in the flue like some one sweeping it. Placing his back against the chimney side of his prison, and his feet on the opposite, he contrived to wriggle himself up till his head was level with the grating. Half turning his head round, he applied his voice to the bars, and inquired who was there.

"The devil," was the laconic reply.

"For God's sake don't trifle with me," replied the poor fellow, "but if you have any humanity, answer, who are you?"

"Well, then, I'm a chummy: who are you?"

"A prisoner."

"Out of Newgate?"

"No," replied Dick, "but who soon will send one or two there if I can get my liberty. A horrible murder has been committed, and I am kept here a prisoner while the perpetrater escapes. Have you seen nothing about it in the papers?"

"No, I can't read."

"In Spitalfields," added the captive; "robbery and murder. I am sure there must be a reward offered."

"I know; I heard master reading about it t'other morning to missus, at dinner. I know. Whereabouts be'est thee?" added the chimney-sweep.

"Do you know the lodging-house kept by one Duncan?"

"Well; this chimney belongs to the next house."

"Will you assist me?"

"Damn it, I'll do what I can; but how am I to let you out?—old Duncan is an ugly customer; he'd thrash any two like me."

"I tell you," added Dick, in an agony of terror lest the occasion should be lost, "that there is money to be made."

"How much?"

"Most likely hundreds."

"Hast thee nothing to give me now?" demanded the chummy, to whom the word "hundreds" sounded like something vague and fabulous; "nothing like a bird in the hand."

Fortunately for Dick, he still retained his silver hunting-watch and chain. Now a watch had been the ambition of the poor chimney-sweeper's life. He had often dreamed of possessing one; had more than once begun saving to realise his dream; but illness or want of employment had as often compelled him to break in upon his little hoard. So that when the prisoner proposed to give him his on condition that he informed the inspector of the police of his position, the poor fellow was so overjoyed that he would have undertaken to deliver him alone from his captivity, despite his fears of the redoubtable Duncan.

"There it is," said Dick, pushing it through the grating; "and God forgive you if you play me false."

Anxious to ascertain whether it was really a watch he felt in his hand, for the chimney was so dark it was impossible to see it, the sweep mounted to the top of the flue; no sooner was he satisfied than he descended with the agility of a monkey to his former position.

"All right, master," he whispered; "I'm off to the police. I have marked the *chimbley*, and know where to find thee. I'll soon be back."

"Stay," whispered Dick; "the hole in the loft which leads to my prison is in Duncan's bed-room, just over the closet."

"Ay, ay!" and the sound of the poor fellow's voice gradually died away as he descended the flue.

Peter Snowball, as the chimney-sweeper was generally called—not that such was his real name—was not so great a fool as the world gave him credit for. He recollected that the house in which he was employed was occupied by a man who was the sworn friend of Duncan's, and that the least word or appearance of alarm on his part would excite suspicion, and perhaps defeat his purpose; no sooner, therefore, had he descended than he began quietly sweeping up the soot which had fallen, and asked the man of the house, who was a mason, if he had another job for him.

"No," said the fellow, surlily; "but Duncan has, I believe, next door."

"I hope, then, he'll pay me better for it than he did the last; I swept five chimneys, and he grumbled to give me sixpence, saying that I was paid well enough for my work by the soot."

"Ay, ay; Duncan knows the value of money," replied the mason, at the same time giving the sweep threepence. "He does not pay through the nose, as I do, for every thing. Now," he added, "be off with you. I have to leave the house to go to work, and shall be late as it is."

Peter, who was anxious to leave the place, desired no better; shouldering his sack, and taking his brushes in his hand, he was about to quit, when the door opened and Duncan entered. The Scot started as he beheld the sweep, for he suddenly recollected the grate which communicated between the chimney and the cell in which his prisoner was confined.

"Been having your chimneys swept?" he said, remaining at the same time so close to the door that it was impossible for the sweeper to pass.

"Yes, Master Duncan," replied Peter, whose coolness seldom deserted him, "and I was just coming to you."

"To me!"

"Ay," continued the sweep, placing his bag upon the ground, and settling himself as if for a bit of gossip; "your neighbour here says that your chimney wants sweeping too, and I may as well kill two birds with one stone; but I hope you will pay me for it better than you did the last."

The cautious Mr. Duncan was so completely thrown off his guard by the well-acted suavity of the speaker, that he smiled internally at his own suspicions. Had the poor fellow but winced or faltered in his reply to him, the ruffian would have smashed his brains with as little remorse as Peter would have put his foot upon a black beetle; for, with all his aversion to shedding blood, it was prudence, not principle, that restrained him.

"Shall I go in?" added the sweep, coolly; "I know the flue."

"No, no—not to-day. I'll send for you in a week or so."

"I shall charge you sixpence a piece if I come express. You had better have them done now."

"I tell you no!"

When Duncan positively said "No," he did not often break his word. Peter, as if satisfied that it would be useless to urge him any further, quietly took up his bag of soot and walked to the door, muttering something about thrifty Scots.

"Why the devil didn't you let me know you were going to have the chimney swept?" demanded Dick's gaoler of his neighbour.

"Why so?"

"I have a bird in the cage up yonder, whom chummy might have seen."

"Whom he has seen, most likely."

"Not a bit of it," continued the Scot. "If I thought he had, I'd spoil his clambering for some time. Look," he added, walking to the window and pointing out Peter to his companion, "he is talking with the grocer's wife. Had he discovered any thing he would have bolted to the police the first thing. All is right, I tell you; but what time will you be at home this evening?"

"At eight."

"I have a proposal to make to you. If you agree to it, you may give up plastering for life. I have thought it well over in my own mind, and am resolved upon it."

"What is it?" eagerly demanded the mason.

"Don't be impatient; you shall know all in good time," replied Duncan; "remember, don't fail me at eight."

The worthies separated with the understanding that at eight they were to meet again. The two neighbours had long been confederates in their schemes of plunder. Many a robber had found concealment beneath their roofs—for there was a private means of communication between the houses—at the price of the plunder for which he had risked his life. They were both as rapacious as unprincipled. The Scot at first had determined to keep his scheme a secret from his associate; but after turning the plan he meditated over in his own mind for three days, he came at last to the decision that it could not be carried out without his assistance, and hence his tardy confidence.

About two hours after the departure of the sweep, Duncan, while busily occupied in the lower part of the house, heard the street door open, and three or four persons enter the kitchen, the usual rendezvous of the poor wretches who nightly occupied his miserable lodgings. Not doubting but that the intruders were some of his usual customers, he quietly finished his work, and mounted up stairs. The moment he entered the room, he found himself pinioned by two policemen, who were accompanied by Peter and the inspector and sergeant. The ruffian's heart misgave him; he guessed in an instant the cause of his arrest, and bitterly cursed himself that he had suffered the well-acted indifference of the sweep to deceive him. Trusting, however, to the difficulty of finding the entrance to the den where Dick was confined, and still more believing in their ignorance of the concealed chamber, he resolved to brave it to the last.

"What the devil does this mean?" he demanded. "Keep your hands off! I don't like such jokes."

"I never play jokes," replied the inspector. "They are quite out of my way."

"And if it is earnest, then may I ask what it means?"

"Certainly, since you are to conduct us to the place we come to seek. You have a person, it seems, secreted in your house."

"A good many at times, I have no doubt, have secreted themselves here."

"Ay, but against his will forcibly detained."

"A likely story!" said the Scot, affecting a laugh. "Search the house, and if you find any living thing except myself and the dog, I'll eat it. Some one has been making a fool of you."

"We shall see," quietly answered the inspector. "Have the kindness to conduct us to your sleeping-room."

At the mention of the sleeping-room the landlord changed colour. At first he hoped that the sweep had merely perceived that there was some one confined in the cell, without having had any communication with him; but the request of the police to conduct them to the sleeping-room convinced him that the danger was greater than he anticipated. Bitterly did he regret that he had not yielded to Faddle's request, and permitted him to cut his prisoner's throat.

"My sleeping-room!" he exclaimed; "I shall do no such thing. What the devil do you want there? and by what authority do you act? I demand to see it."

"Certainly," replied the inspector; "nothing can be more just. In this country every man is entitled to see upon what authority he is arrested."

"I owe no man a farthing."

"People are arrested for other things than debt," observed the sweep; "murder, for instance."

"Robbery," added the sergeant.

"But I have committed neither robbery or murder," interrupted the Scot, "that you should search my house. In England every man's house is his castle."

"But not to keep prisoners in."

"Or hide murderers in."

Duncan's countenance fell. He felt that protestations would be useless. In vain he tried to shake off his captors. Powerful as he was, his efforts were useless, and only provoked the inspector to order him to be handcuffed. No sooner was the last operation accomplished than Peter Snowball, who held him in mortal terror, suddenly took courage, and exclaimed:

"Come along with me, I'll show you the room."

Under the sweep's conduct, the entrance to the loft, which was artfully concealed by a sliding-board over the closet, was discovered, the ladder applied, and Dick finally released from his captivity. When the police saw the den in which he had been kept, and

the state of his swollen limbs, they felt perfectly satisfied with the sweep's tale respecting the murder; they guessed that it was to prevent the discovery of some great crime that the poor fellow had been incarcerated.

Mr. Duncan calculated, like a prudent man, that as the chance of sharing the plunder had slipped through his fingers, the next best thing he could do was to secure the reward of a thousand pounds already offered for the apprehension of the murderer.

"Inspector," he said, "there is a thousand pounds to be won, and I think I have won it; that fellow is one of the assassins of the woman who was shot three days since at the factory in Spitalfields."

"I know it," said the officer.

"And if you pull aside the bed," added Dick, who had been accommodated with a chair, "you will find the entrance to the hiding-place of the man who committed the deed. There is no occasion for Mr. Duncan's disinterested evidence."

The bed was drawn on one side, and Faddle, who had heard from his solitary chamber the voices of the party, was dragged, more dead than alive, from his hiding-place. As soon as he saw Dick, he felt that all chance of escape was over; but he trusted that, at least, he should be able to involve him in the same doom as himself.

"Fool," he whispered to the landlord, "you had better have taken my advice."

Mr. Duncan thought so too, but was silent.

The whole party were marched off to the police-office, where the magistrates were then sitting. It was in vain that the Scot sought to change characters with Peter Snowball, and appear as a denouncer of the man he had concealed; his evidence was not listened to. At the close of the third examination he was committed as an accessory after the fact, and Faddle—the once gay, handsome, dashing Faddle—on the capital charge of murder. Dick, on account of his enfeebled state, was confined to the infirmary; the statement which Rose had made before her death went far to exonerate him from all but a part in the robbery, and it was the opinion of the police that he would get off, at the worst, with transportation for life.

"So," said Faddle to himself, as soon as he was left alone in his cell, "this is the end of all my calculation and knowledge of the world! Who would have thought that the old school-copy—the first, by the bye, I ever wrote—would prove the true lesson of wisdom at last? *Honesty is the best policy.* Unfortunately, I have found the secret out too late to profit by it. Fool!" he added, "fool! I ought to have calculated my chances better. After having escaped for two murders, it was tempting my fate—betting against all odds to risk a third."

Strange to say, the change from Duncan's lodging to the prison, where he had at least such society as the place afforded, instead of depressing his spirits, elevated them; and all who heard his rattling conversation, and saw his cool demeanour, predicted he would die game.

The day after the arrest of her murderer, the funeral of poor Rose took place. Walter Maynard and the orphan left to his charge were the only mourners, and their tears fell in unison upon her grave. She was buried, as she had requested, in the spot where, when a happy thoughtless girl, she used to walk with the object of her first and only love. No stone was ever raised to mark the spot; but often, when the spring was green, when years had passed away, a young and aged man would come and tend the flowers which grew upon the grave: they were the mourners, who had planted them.

As for Wilmott, his son was spared the disgrace of seeing his father placed in the felons' dock. From the night of the murder and robbery, till the hour of his death, he remained a maniac. The only word he was ever known to utter was the name of his wife: he would sometimes cry, "Rose, Rose!"

The trial of Faddle at last took place. As it was impossible to identify the gold found upon his person, he had obtained a sufficient sum from the magistrates to employ counsel and to make a respectable appearance before the court; which last circumstance served to give him more satisfaction than any other. He was most particular in his directions to the tailor, who measured him for a full dress suit of black, that they should be fashionable and handsome; and complained, when brought home, that the fit was not as good as he had a right to expect at the price.

"Damn the fit!" said the Scot, who was present; "they are quite good enough to be hanged in."

"You think so?" replied his fellow-prisoner, without changing colour.

"Yes."

"I do not then. Should such a disagreeable accident as the one you allude to arrive, having moved all my life in good society, the ceremony would doubtless be honoured by the presence of many of my former friends. I should not like to disgrace them by making a shabby appearance. By the bye," he added, "as you are to be indicted with me, I wish you would follow my example."

"Not I."

"You would look so much more respectable."

"Damn the respectability of the thing!" exclaimed the Scot, passionately; "and damn the hour in which I first set eyes upon you! You have been my destruction."

"Not so," said Faddle; "blame that principle of caution which induced you to spare the life of the cur who betrayed us both. Had you allowed me to cut his throat, by this time we might both of us have been in America."

"I wish I had!" muttered the Scot; "I wish I had!"

It seemed to be the aim of Faddle to affect the man of the world—to treat life as a jest, and die as though it were the most indifferent thing in the world. As far as the rules of the prison permitted, he indulged in the comforts of the table, and on the morning of his trial made an excellent breakfast at an early hour, and then carefully arranged his toilet.

He was not deceived in his expectation of a fashionable auditory at his trial. His affair with the unhappy Lady Wilton was still remembered; and no less than seven peers, a royal duke, two ambassadors, and eleven ladies of title, were crowded on the bench, to the great inconvenience of the judge. A supercilious smile curled the prisoner's lip as he saw the array of rank and fashion. He felt as much flattered as a favourite actor would have been whose retirement from the stage was feared by a brilliant audience; with this difference perhaps, that, unlike the actor, Faddle intended to introduce some new and startling readings in the part.

Dick was first arraigned for the robbery, but no evidence being offered, he was acquitted, and discharged from the dock, in order that he might give his evidence against his old master. As the trial

proceeded. Rose's declaration was put in and read, after which Dick appeared in the witness box. The poor fellow guessed the species of cross-examination he would undergo, and would have given worlds to have been anywhere but where he stood. He distinctly swore that he saw Faddle fire the pistol, and Rose fall on receiving the shot, also that he had that very evening previously attempted her life. This closed the evidence for the prosecution.

Mr. Craybill, the counsel for the prisoner, rose to cross-examine.

"I think you once lived servant with the prisoner?"

"I did, sir."

"Were in his confidence?"

"Like most servants, sir."

"Remember, sir, you are on your oath. I presume you know the nature of an oath?" added the learned gentleman, looking virtuously indignant at the prisoner.

"I hope I do, sir."

"Well, then, by virtue of your oath, did you ever commit a forgery upon the prisoner?"

Here Mr. Goosebeak, the gentleman employed for the prosecution, jumped up, and informed the witness that he was not obliged to answer any question which tended to criminate himself in any way.

"Thank you, sir," said Dick, coolly. "I don't intend."

"You decline answering that question, then?" said Mr. Craybill.

"Most particularly."

"The jury will judge of your reasons. Pray, sir, were you ever married?"

"Yes," sighed Richard.

"How many times?"

"Only once at a time, sir."

"Very well," said the lawyer, smiling; "I see you fancy yourself a wit; but I shall catch you yet. I ask you, sir, on your oath, how often have you gone through the marriage ceremony?"

Dick hesitated. The lady who at present called herself his better-half stood glaring on him from the body of the court. He knew that the counsel's cross-examination would not be half so severe as hers. He did not dare to perjure himself, not knowing how far there might be evidence in court to convict him. An idea at last struck him.

"I have been twice married, sir—once to the lady who is now my wife, and once to one Nancy Bartlett."

"And pray what became of Nancy Bartlett?" demanded the advocate.

"Ask the prisoner."

Faddle was thunderstruck at the reply, and his countenance was observed to change. The opera-glasses were levelled at him with redoubled interest.

"What do you mean, sir, by 'ask the prisoner?'"

"He took her from me on the very day of our marriage."

"Were you ever divorced from her?"

"No."

"And yet you married another."

"She was murdered," said Dick.

"Indeed! by whom?"

"Ask the prisoner," replied the witness, scarcely knowing what to say, but led to make the same reply a second time from the impression it produced the first. The paleness of Faddle's countenance became frightful, and Sir Henry Stringer, who was present as a spectator of the trial, became suddenly impressed with the conviction that Nancy had been murdered by the man who had so infamously betrayed and then deserted her. In his agitation he would have addressed the judge, but was prevented by his friends. The wily lawyer saw that something was going wrong against his client, and wisely contented himself with the advantage he had gained.

In his address to the jury, he pointed out to them how worthless was the character of the man on whose evidence they were called upon to sacrifice the life of a fellow creature—a man who refused to answer whether he had ever committed forgery, on the unblushing plea that it might tend to criminate himself; and concluded with more than hinting that it was his deliberate opinion the witness and accused should change places before justice could be done. The robbery he did not attempt to deny—even lawyer Craybill had not effrontery enough for that.

The judge followed, and his summing up was so far favourable to the prisoner, that it expressed a doubt whether there was sufficient evidence to fix the act upon the prisoner without the testimony of Dick; adding, it was for them to judge how far such testimony could be relied on. A faint smile, like the first dawn of an unexpected hope, passed over the features of the prisoner as the judge concluded his charge.

"Has the prisoner any witnesses to call as to character?" demanded the foreman of the jury.

Faddle hastily wrote two or three names on a slip of paper, and handed them to his counsel.

"Certainly he has!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Crier, call Lord John Loftus, the Earl of Spodeswood, Lord Semple, the Countess of Bassett, and Lady William Brampton."

Our readers may well imagine the confusion and rage of the above noble and honourable personages on hearing themselves named. They were one and all seated on the bench, led by a morbid curiosity to be present at a trial which promised excitement—a pleasure to be procured at almost any price.

The rage of the ladies was ludicrous. They endeavoured to quit the court; but the judge, who, perhaps, was not sorry to punish them for the inconvenience he had suffered, at the request of the learned advocate, restrained them.

Lord John Loftus, an exquisite of the first water whose bow was an indorsement to a man's character as good as a banker's to a bill, was the first witness examined.

"I believe, my lord," said the counsellor, blandly, "you are acquainted with the gentleman at the bar?"

"I have seen him," was the discreet reply.

"That is, you have met him frequently in society, I suppose?"

"In society never; in sporting circles often."

"Of course you are aware that he bore the reputation of a gentleman?"

"Men betted with him," said his lordship, carelessly; "and the jury know as well I can tell them exactly how much or how little that implies."

The Countess of Bassett was next placed in the box. Her ladyship was rather *passé*, and defended by her rank and wealth, cared but little for the opinion of the world; she had ten years before carried on a flirtation with the prisoner—nay, even visited him at his lodgings; but that was forgotten in her indignation in being placed in a position so ridiculous, *vis-à-vis* her fashionable friends, and she determined that her evidence should not materially serve the cause of Lawyer Craybill's client.

"I believe, countess, you are acquainted with the unhappy gentleman at the bar?"

"Not in the least," was the cool answer of her ladyship, who raised her glass to examine her former paramour, with a nerve which would have done honour to a more experienced hand at the Old Bailey than she was ever likely to prove.

"Am I to understand," demanded the astonished lawyer, "that you are unacquainted, perfectly unacquainted?"

"Perfectly."

"That you never met in society?"

"It is impossible to answer that question—one meets so many persons in the world without knowing who they are, or where they come from."

"May I ask what your ladyship understands by being acquainted?"

"Certainly; having your names mutually inscribed on each other's visiting books."

"And Captain Faddle's never was on yours?"

"Never."

Here the prisoner hastily scribbled something, and passed it to his counsel.

"May I ask," continued the lawyer, smiling as he read it, "did you ever visit him?"

"Sir!"

The look of virtuous indignation would have awed a less experienced hand than the lawyer; but he was not easily put down. He repeated the question.

"Certainly not," replied the countess. "I never visit with any whose names are not inscribed on my list. How can you ask such a shocking question?" demanded the lady. "All I know of the prisoner is his unfortunate connection with a noble lady, whom, from respect to her memory, I forbear to name, whom he first dishonoured and then robbed."

At these words the countenance of the judge was observed to change. From the number of years which had elapsed he had forgotten the name of Lady Wilton's paramour. His early career had been protected by her husband, whose unhappy suicide had interrupted his success. Indeed, there was little doubt that had the unfortunate nobleman lived, instead of a simple Baron of the Exchequer, his lordship would have been Chief Justice of the Common Pleas. Faddle's advocate perceived, when too late, the error into which he had fallen. The previous summing up of the judge had been favourable, rather than otherwise, to his client. The examination of witnesses as to character gave him the right of again addressing the jury and commenting upon the evidence.

"It is unfortunate, very unfortunate," observed his lordship, with marked emphasis, "that the accused should have called witnesses to character who have given a testimony so very unfavourable; for although the antecedents of a criminal, in the administration of justice, ought to be discarded in the consideration of the specific crime of which he is accused, they have their weight in the awarding of the punishment, and must, more or less, influence the verdict of the jury. Gentlemen," he added, "I have nothing to append to my charge: the patient intelligence you have shown throughout the progress of the trial sufficiently proves to me that you will perform your *painful* duty with the conscientiousness of men who know how to respect the sanctity of an oath."

Few as these words were, the impression they produced upon the minds of the jury was decisive. While they were consulting together in the box, one of the counsel observed to the advocate of Faddle:

"Never call a reluctant witness to character, especially a woman; they are sure to damn the best cause in the world. Her ladyship has hanged your client."

"I am not so sure of that," replied the man of law; "the jury still hesitate."

"Guilty, for a rump and dozen!" whispered a brother barrister.

"Done!"

"Done!"

The bet was made, and both parties turned round to observe the countenances of the jury, as they were consulting together in the box.

"Perhaps, gentlemen," observed the judge, "you would like to retire? If so, the sheriff can impannel another jury."

There was a slight, very slight tone of surprise in the voice of his lordship as he put the question. It seemed to ask if they could be so stupid as to entertain any doubt upon the subject.

"It is not necessary, my lord," answered the foreman. "We are agreed."

The jurors turned round, and the clerk put the question to the foreman in the usual way, ending with, "How say you, gentlemen, guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty," replied the foreman.

"You have lost your bet," whispered the barrister to Faddle's counsel. "Damn the fellow! how coolly he takes it!"

"Yes, I should like to have got him off. The case was an interesting one—very. What fee?"

"Only fifty; I could not be hard upon him."

Every eye was fixed upon Faddle as the judge arrayed himself in his black coif, and proceeded to pass sentence of death upon the prisoner, whose countenance retained, during the lengthened address, the same immobility which had characterised it throughout the trial. When his lordship had concluded, he bowed gracefully to him; and casting a look upon the countess, which her ladyship long afterwards remembered, quitted the bar, and the court broke up. The Scotchman, who was found guilty of being an accessory after the fact, was condemned to transportation for life.

On his return to the prison, according to custom, the person of Faddle was carefully searched, and every instrument which could possibly be employed for the purpose of self-destruction taken from him; he smiled during the operation, and asked the governor what they intended to do with his money.

"At the disposal of the crown," replied the functionary.

"There is a small sum I should like to dispose of."

"In that case you must apply to the sheriff, sir. Every thing is in his charge."

The prisoner was removed from the cell he had previously occupied to the one usually reserved for condemned prisoners. Here a slight repast of tea and bread and butter was given him, for the prison regulations no longer permitted the supply of any thing more luxurious than the prison fare. Two gaolers were appointed to watch him day and night.

"Right," he observed, as soon as he was informed of the purpose for which they were placed with him. "The people ought not to be deprived of their comedy through the absence of the principal actor. It might be difficult to find a substitute to take his part."

"Actor!" repeated the astonished governor, opening his eyes unusually wide.

"And what is life but acting?" demanded the condemned. "Did you observe the judge in preparing to pronounce sentence? How carefully he made up his countenance for the occasion! Ten to one but he had rehearsed it this very morning in the glass. The very tone, the rise and fall of his voice, were studied; it was the great point of his part. The tears, too, were well thrown in. Do you, with your experience, imagine," he added, "that his lordship will take one glass of wine at dinner the less this evening for having sent a fellow creature—as he condescendingly termed me—to the scaffold? On the contrary, ten to one but it gives a zest."

There was no tone of bravado or bitterness in the manner in which the remark was made; Faddle uttered it, as he sipped his tea, as though it was a matter of the most profound indifference to him whether they hanged him or not, and yet in his heart he clung to life; but with the determination which marked his career through its long years of crime, he resolved to die and make no sign. The governor thought within himself that of all the criminals who had fallen under his observation, Faddle was the most extraordinary. Perhaps it was because he understood him the least. "The chaplain," he murmured, "will have a hard task to make him die decently;" and the thought filled the worthy man with regret, for he liked to read in the papers the morning after an execution, "The criminal thanked the worthy chaplain and governor for their unremitting attention to his spiritual welfare, and declared that he died at peace." He thought it looked respectable. He had known many natures, apparently as stubborn as Faddle's, vanquished by kindness; he resolved, therefore, to try the effects, and began by asking, in a tone of professional commiseration, if there was any thing he could do for him.

"If not against the rules, I should like a cigar."

The request was against the rules, but after consulting with the doctor, it was decided that the prisoner should be allowed his request, as a thing which habit had rendered necessary to his health.

That same evening the chaplain visited the murderer in his cell; he found him pacing the floor, not with the uneven, hurried step which denotes a soul in agony, or a mind tortured with fear, but with

the cool, quiet lounge of a Bond Street exquisite, anxious only to kill the time he had no means of employing.

"How shocking!" whispered the good man to the governor.

"Very!" echoed the functionary.

"He seems to be quite an infidel!"

"Worse, if possible!"

Although Faddle guessed from the appearance of the reverend gentleman, and the clerical cut of his coat, the nature both of his office and the cause of his visit, he continued his promenade without the least notice, as if their appearance in the cell did not in any way concern him. The governor's patience was almost at an end.

"Prisoner," he observed, sharply, "the chaplain is come to visit you."

"Indeed," replied Faddle, raising his hat, and bowing, as he would have done to an acquaintance at the Opera. "Introduce us."

"My office, unhappy man," said the clergyman, advancing to him, "is my best introduction. Let me entreat you to cast aside this affected indifference! Think upon the few hours you have yet to live! the crimes yet unrepented of! the awful Judge before whom you so soon must answer them! Think of these things; remember that though the body perisheth, the soul lives for ever!"

"Does it?" said Faddle, with an air of surprise, as if he heard the doctrine for the first time in his life.

"Doubtless."

"It must suffer awfully from ennui, then!"

And the speaker resumed his walk, leaving the chaplain more than shocked at the irreligious response to his well-meant exhortation. To do the reverend gentleman justice, he was one of those clergymen who wish conscientiously to perform their office. As a village pastor, he would have no doubt worthily filled his duties, but in the position of gaol chaplain he was lost, unequal to the task.

There is no position, perhaps, which a clergyman can hold, where more eloquence, a deeper knowledge of the human heart, and the springs which move it, are required, than that of chaplain to a prison. He has to contend with passion and despair; ignorance, terror, infidelity, and crime; to give hope to the hopeless, consolation to the wretched; and yet how seldom do we find the office filled by one who brings with him to the task the eloquence, piety, and energy, so necessary to render his ministry other than a mockery and an idle form. The worthy man, conscious of his deficiency, endeavoured to atone by earnestness and fervour for the lack of those higher endowments so requisite and so wanting on the occasion. Faddle listened to his exhortation with a polite but cold indifference, which told him his efforts, however well meant, were in vain.

"Can nothing move thee?" demanded the mortified chaplain; "think how near thou art to eternity, and how fearful is the crime for which thou hast to answer; thou hast thrown, like a heedless spendthrift, life away; let not thine immortal soul be cast like some worthless thing to follow it; deceive not thyself with the vain hope that, in satisfying human justice, thou hast appeased that of heaven."

"Human justice!" repeated Faddle with a sneer; "where is it? in what does it consist? In the perpetration of the same crime of which I am supposed guilty? Mark me, I say supposed, for I neither avow or deny my crime. Show me the right which man possesses to wrest the sceptre from the hands of Him you call your God, and judge his fellow men, and then perhaps I may be induced to answer you."

"Is it not written, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed?'" demanded the clergyman, not a little troubled at the question that was raised between them.

"And is it not also written," retorted the condemned, "'Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you?'"

"Granted."

"Has man done so by me?" continued the criminal; "was I not an outcast from the hour of my birth—robbed even of the inheritance of a name, and left to struggle with impulses which you call passions, unaided and alone? What was the first lesson taught me by my fellow creatures?—injustice, cruelty, oppression; man stretched forth his hand to wrong me; woman smiled only to deceive me—friendship to betray me. Wonder not, then, if I deny the right of this miscalled immaculate society to judge or punish for practising the lessons it first taught me: I but practise more or less what I have endured."

"Surely religion," urged the chaplain, "proves that."

"Pshaw! religion! Hath it made mankind one jot the better? No; it is but a mask, the more to hide the sneers on its harlot face."

"Infidel!"

"Perhaps—perhaps not. What'e'er my creed, good sir, for years it has been mine; I am now either too old or too near my time to study any other. You will find others in this prison to whom your ministry, doubtless, will be welcome; let me advise you to employ it there: for me, I shall die as I have lived, alone with my own thoughts."

"Give utterance to them: if false, they may be combatted."

"Not so," replied the prisoner with a faint smile, "they are the only things I never yet imparted freely. We are all the creatures of habit, sir. For myself, I do not hesitate to confess I am its slave."

The unsatisfactory nature of the chaplain's interview with the condemned prisoner soon became noised about by those morning papers who pander to the curiosity of the breakfast-table, by relating every particular respecting the conduct of a man whom the law has condemned to die. The very fact that a human being so situated becomes, from the moment sentence is passed upon him, invested with a dignity and marked interest, goes far to question the right of mankind to pronounce such sentence. The account of the impenitent state of the prisoner set all the saints, male and female, in agitation. Here was a victory to be achieved—a triumph over Satan to be gained by his conversion. The sheriffs were besieged with applications for admission to him; and several most respectable Christians were bitterly indignant at being refused the opportunity of displaying their zeal and gratifying their curiosity by visiting so notorious a sinner. Others were more successful. The Anti-Hanging Association, with their wealthy chairman, Mr. Smoothskin, the rich banker, at their head, were too important a body to be refused. The sheriffs, being in trade, might one day require accommodation, and they knew that none are so bitter in their resentment, or so difficult to mollify, as your religious popularity-hunters.

Four days before the time appointed for the execution, three of the most influential members of the society were crossing the yard of the prison, accompanied by the sheriff, on their way to the condemned

cell. The impassibility of Faddle to their exhortations —his shrewd and caustic replies, had piqued as well as interested them, and they determined to strain every nerve to convert or save him. If we consider it rightly, it is a strange feeling that which induces men to occupy themselves only with the depraved and hardened criminal. The honest, virtuous labourer, expiring on his bed of straw, attracts but little of their attention. Let him, by despair or hunger, be driven to commit a murder, and he becomes a hero.

"I say, Jack," whispered one of the turnkeys to a dark-whiskered man who was lounging in the yard, "there go your friends."

"Damn them!" growled the fellow, who, indeed, was no other than the executioner. "How would they like it if I was to try to take the bread out of their mouths? With all their religion, they would make noise enough!"

"Not unlikely," replied the turnkey, drily.

"But it won't do," added the finisher of the law, with a look of contempt. "The English are sensible people, and stick to their constitution. Now hanging is a part of the constitution. What would become of their banks, the Queen, and the funds, if hanging was done away with? They would be the first to call for it again. As I once heard Sergeant Arlan say, 'society has no better friend than the hangman.'"

"Very true, and yet some of the papers lately have been calling out to introduce the French fashion, and take their heads off with a *gollontine*, I think they call it."

"Have they? I should like to have the handling of the editors, that's all," observed the executioner, whose constitutional ideas were very much shocked at the innovation; for, like his predecessors, he was a staunch conservative.

"Have you seen the cove?" continued the turnkey.

"Sunday—in chapel. A cool hand."

"How do you think he'll work off?"

"Game—game, sir, to the back-bone. If the saints don't spoil him he will do credit to his bringing up."

"Mind he does not escape you yet; I heard the sheriff tell the governor that the gentlemen were to have an interview with the Secretary of State at one o'clock."

And such really was the case. An election in the city was at hand, and the government, although determined to do its duty, and be guided only by the opinion of the judge who tried the prisoner, did not deem it advisable to offend the deputation—composed of the most wealthy and influential men in the city —by refusing to receive them.

The deputation entered the cell, where Faddle was occupying himself as usual by pacing the floor; he stopped in the centre as soon as he saw them, and bowed with his imperturbable politeness. To judge from his behaviour, it would seem he was resolved nothing should disturb his serenity; to live or die appeared a matter of equal indifference.

"We are come once more, friend," said the foremost of the party, who was an Independant, "to inquire if the Lord hath touched thy soul with grace and brought thee to a sense of the awful peril in which thou art placed?"

"By no fault of mine," replied the condemned; "I am but what society has made me."

The worthy man groaned at the reply; it was his own pet argument at the monthly meetings of the Anti-Hanging Society, and he felt its force.

"Have you nothing to urge," he demanded, "which might induce the government to reconsider your case?"

"Tell me," replied Faddle, "what would induce them to reconsider it, and I shall be most happy to urge it."

The worthy banker was silent.

"Believe me, my dear sir, the government is too much occupied with its own interests to waste either time or thought upon an investigation which requires both; and, after all, it is much less trouble to hang a man than to trace, step by step, the line of circumstantial evidence which has led to his condemnation —to detect how much prejudice weighed with an ignorant jury, and how much the evidence."

The last observation was made with an indifference which piqued the curiosity of the entire party; they could not understand the character they had to deal with.

"It is a sad thing," observed one of them, "to find a man of your mind in such a position; you appear to have been well educated."

"The world was my schoolmaster, then," replied the criminal; "for of books I know but little; and yet," he added, "I have received what is generally termed an education."

"Where were you born?"

"Whether in a palace or a cottage signifies but little," was the reply, "since I am to die upon a gibbet."

"Have you no friends yet living?"

"Friends!" repeated Faddle, with a look of contempt at the ignorance of the questioner, and half surprise; "did you ever know the unfortunate possess any?"

"None who feel interested in your fate?"

"None; I shall die as I have lived—alone."

There was something in the tone and bearing of the speaker which, despite the enormity of the crime he was charged with, excited the sympathy of his hearers. He knew that they were men of influence, and shrewdly enough assumed a manner calculated to excite their curiosity.

The deputation was received by the Secretary of State with his usual urbanity. He listened with the utmost courtesy and patience to all they had to urge, not only against the infliction of capital punishment, but in favour of the condemned. He was too keen an observer of mankind to enter into a discussion on the first part of the question. He heard them out, and taking up the judge's notes who presided on the trial, regretted that the opinion of the learned gentleman was so opposed to theirs that he could not find it his duty to recommend to the crown, in the present case, a commutation of the punishment.

"But the taking of human life," observed the head of the deputation, "is repugnant to our convictions as Christians."

"Still it is the law," answered the minister.

"In the present case," observed another, "the evidence does not appear sufficiently conclusive."

"The jury were satisfied with it," added the statesman.

"There are at least extenuating circumstances."

"The judge does not think so."

This last answer was conclusive. Few men, however deep their convictions, have the boldness to differ in opinion with those whom the constitution has invested with the prerogative of pronouncing the decisions of the law. Convinced that all further entreaties would be useless, the deputa-

tion withdrew, charmed with the noble lord's urbanity of manner, and satisfied with themselves. If they had not succeeded in saving the life of the condemned criminal, they had at least done the next thing most agreeable to themselves—made their opinions heard. It is true the law was allowed to take its course; but then their names appeared in the newspapers as having had an audience with the government on the subject of capital punishment. Men praised their zeal; and the saints rejoiced, although Faddle was hanged.

The criminal received the news of their failure with his usual apathy. He had never entertained any great hope of success; consequently, the disappointment was less, and he determined not to belie the reputation for firmness by giving way to weakness at his last hour. The well-meant exhortations of the chaplain were listened to with polite indifference. Whatever his feelings or views touching a future state of reward and punishment, he kept them to himself; every word which fell from him he knew was reported by the press, and he experienced a morbid pleasure in becoming the hero, as it were, of a destiny as fearful as that which awaited him.

"Can nothing move thee?" demanded the clergyman.

"Nothing," replied Faddle; "I have lived without fear, and shall die as I have lived."

"Only confess your crime."

"To what end?"

"To satisfy the public mind of the justice of your sentence."

"The public, my dear sir, interests itself very little in the matter. Nay, I believe," he added, "in its love of excitement, it would be rather left in doubt. It would be a pity to disappoint them."

"You are mistaken," urged the chaplain; "the interest your fate excites is intense."

"Is it?" observed the condemned, with a look of surprise; "town must be getting dull then; but, after all," he added, "I am not surprised; the opera season is nearly over."

"Opera!" repeated the astonished priest.

"By the bye, is the Derby run for?"

The worthy man, who really was sincere in his exhortations to bring the murderer to a fitting sense of his awful position, left the cell, fearful lest he should no longer be able to restrain the just indignation which oppressed him. In his way across the prison-yard he encountered the governor. It was the evening preceding the day appointed for the execution. The latter personage had just received an intimation from the Home-office that the law would be permitted to take its course, and he had been giving the necessary orders to his subordinates.

"Well, sir," he demanded, "in what state did you leave the prisoner?"

"Awful, governor, awful; the wretch is not fit to die. I never was so puzzled with any fellow in all my life; he takes it as coolly as if it were a party of pleasure he was invited to."

"It will be quite a discredit on the discipline of the prison," observed the governor.

"Quite."

"The Old Bailey will turn up the nose at us, and Horsemonger Lane grow proud."

"What will the papers say?"

"They are easily managed," replied the civilian. "Fortunately the sheriff's breakfast is likely to be a good one. Gunter serves it; and two hampers of champagne have arrived already. Secure the reporters good seats, and the account is sure to be favourable; besides, when you say grace you can throw in something about repentance touching the hardened heart; only don't make it too long; the gentlemen of the press hate a long grace when eating and drinking are going on."

The speakers separated; the chaplain to return home dissatisfied with his exertions, and the governor to give orders to complete the dreadful preparations.

Night at last closed in—the last night which the murderer was destined to pass upon earth; and yet he still retained his cool, apathetic bearing. In the cell with him were two keepers, watching his every movement as he paced the floor of the condemned cell. Every moment they expected that his courage would give way, and Nature assert her rights. They had, in the course of their employment in the prison, watched the last hours of many condemned to die; they had seen agony in all its phases—sullen grief, mad despair, reckless bravado, and the utter prostration of nerve and mind, which renders the hangman's but a secondary office; but never had they witnessed an indifference so stoical—so impassible; there was something unnatural in it, and a feeling of terror gradually crept over them. It was not because they were in the presence of one about to die—custom had rendered such association familiar to them; it was the indifference of the victim of offended Justice to the horrors of his fate. At times they glanced upon each other as if to revive their expiring courage by an assuring look.

Faddle, meanwhile, continued his walk, utterly regardless of the watchers.

"In a few hours more," he muttered to himself, "I shall know the grand secret; life's fever will be over. I wonder," he added, "how many bets are being booked at this very moment whether I die game or not. Perhaps the very window from which I and Wilmott saw Hawk take his last leap is let to some former friend. The old woman with her tea and rolls, if living yet, will reap a rich harvest before this time to-morrow; it would be a pity to disappoint her, not that I should much mind it if I had the means."

"I think I see a change in him," whispered the eldest of the two turnkeys, drawing a cloud from his pipe, and puffing it behind his companion. "I told you it would not last."

The younger one gave a knowing nod of his head in reply.

"By this time," continued the prisoner, to himself, "they have begun to erect the scaffold; and the homeless and the wretched, the pickpocket and the prostitute, are gathering in front of the prison, in order to secure front places for the only entertainment the country affords them gratis—the death of a fellow-creature. An execution is their opera, their tragedy, their farce. I have heard the unwashed wretches criticise the appearance of an actor on their stage, with as much gusto as my lord does a new contralto at the opera. And why should they not?" he added; "since it is the only pleasure those who have systematically brutalised them have left them capacity to enjoy. They are not the audience I would disappoint; but the fashion-monger, the wealthy fool who, born to fortune, has no other merit—who, at this very moment perhaps, while his satiated guests turn from his sumptuous board, proposes to finish the night by adjourning to witness my death. I should like to disappoint them—give their broken rest for nothing.

I can face the mob, with its sea of faces, its coarse jokes—perhaps its yells; but not the smiling indifference of those painted butterflies. But how?—how?"

Involuntarily his eyes glanced round the cell, and bitterly did he curse the precautions which Justice had taken to avoid being baffled by her victims. The walls were as smooth as his own plausibility; not a nail, a hook, from which to suspend a cord, had such a thing even been within his reach. As he finished his survey his eyes encountered the fixed regard of the two turnkeys. With the experience of their profession, they had read his thoughts, and their looks seemed to say, "Search—it's all in vain."

For the first time his heart sickened, and he felt hopeless.

"You see what he is up to?" whispered one.

His companion nodded, as usual; for he was one of those men who are as sparing of their words as of their sympathies.

"I am sure his pluck won't hold out," continued the senior.

The second nod was as doubtful; as much as to say that the party was not of the same opinion. Faddle witnessed their bye-play, and quietly resumed his walk. The prison clock struck the hour of twelve—he had just eight hours to breathe, to look upon humanity. As the thought struck him, he felt that it was hard to die in the full enjoyment of health and manly vigour, with all the capabilities of pleasure unwithered. And yet he scarcely wished to live; for thoughts of the past were crowding upon his brain. Like living pictures they passed before him. Nor was it the least part of his punishment that he could not avoid them. First he saw himself a child, sitting at the feet of a fair, pale-faced woman, whose eyes were turned with unutterable affection, such as a mother only feels when gazing on her first-born, upon his. He almost felt a tear as the vision faded from him One corner of his heart still was human. Next he saw himself a youth wandering with a lovely girl on the banks of the river which skirted the village where he was born. The recollection of his boyhood's love, of passions whose nurture is life's purest essence, came over him, and he rejoiced—he, the condemned murderer, rejoiced that, in the tempest of his wild desire, he had respected the purity of that fair girl. Scenes of debauchery, crime, and excitement, followed. Wilmott, young, generous, and confiding, as he first knew him, appeared to ask him for his squandered fortune, his blighted honour, and his ruined hopes; then the unhappy Lady Wilton; Nancy, her eyes fixed in the death-struggle with her ravisher and murderer; and, last of all, Rose—poor Rose! All the events of his life seemed compressed in the duration of a moment, and his brain reeled beneath the burden of its recollections.

"Fool!" he muttered; "fool! my own hand has mingled with gall my cup of life; I have no right to complain of the bitterness of the dregs."

By this time the prison clock struck one.

"I see, friend," he said, recovering himself by a violent effort, "that, like myself, you are fond of the weed."

This was addressed to the senior turnkey, who had all the while been smoking.

"If my pipe is disagreeable to you, I'll put it out," replied the man with deference.

"I would rather you would lend it to me for a few minutes."

The man hesitated.

"I have nothing to offer you in return for the obligation," said Faddle, misunderstanding the cause of his hesitation; "you are aware they have taken every thing I possessed from me."

"It is not that," said the fellow, in a tone of kindness; "it is that I am not certain whether or no it is against the rules. What say you, Dick, eh?"

A nod from the speaker's taciturn companion, as much as to say "give it him," was the only reply. Faddle took the pipe, and seating himself on a chair near the solitary lamp, puffed away for some time in silence. The narcotic exercised its usual soothing influence on those who use it. In the course of half an hour he was as cool and collected as ever.

"I suppose there will be a great crowd to-morrow?' he observed.

"No doubt of it," replied the turnkey, opening his eyes wide with astonishment at so strange a remark from one in his situation.

"Is the gallows up?"

"Not yet, they are erecting it now; but had you not better try and get some sleep?—you forget that you will have to rise very early in the morning."

"I shall have time enough to sleep," replied the prisoner, with a half smile, "and can do without it for one night. Is the executioner skilful?"

"Very; but for heaven's sake don't talk in this way! you had much better say your prayers. I heard the chaplain tell the governor that he considered you but in a queer way."

"And did you believe him?"

"How should I know? he knows his own trade best."

"Ay," said Faddle, bitterly, "there it is; because it is a trade I have refused to listen to him. The whole system is corrupt; half the expense it costs the country to convict and hang the man, expended on the boy, would thin the candidates for Newgate and rob the gallows of its prey."

"Possible," said the man, "but I don't understand these things."

"How should you, when those who teach you are as ignorant as yourself?"

"And was your youth thus neglected?" demanded the taciturn turnkey, for the first time breaking silence.

"No," replied Faddle; "it is the only wrong perhaps of which I have not to accuse the world."

"And yet you have committed murder," observed the man.

"Who says so?"

"The jury."

"Did you never know a jury impatient for their dinner?"

"The judge, then," added the turnkey.

"Is he infallible?"

"Your own conscience."

"Do you hear it speak?" demanded the prisoner. "Lay your finger on my pulse—it beats as calmly as yours; my features are as composed; and yet I have had thoughts that would have broken the hearts of stouter men. Even now, while pacing the floor of this damp cell, my past life flitted like a vision before me—every folly, happiness, and crime. I saw the village where I was born—the school-yard, and old cross at the foot of which I used to play with my young companions, as plainly before me as though I stood at the minster gate, and gazed on them."

"School-house yard and old cross!" repeated the man, his heavy features lighting up with a sudden intelligence. "Why surely you speak of Sedburg, in Yorkshire?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Faddle hastily, unwilling to give the least clue that might lead to the history of his early life; "there are many places besides Sedburg, which answer the description."

"Can you name one?"

The prisoner was silent; in the fulness of his heart he had indicated the spot where his infant years and boyhood had been passed. By a singular coincidence the gaoler was from the same place. He saw from the expression of the man's countenance that denial was vain.

"Well then," he said, "I did mean Sedburg."

"I could have sworn it," replied the man, "the moment I heard your description. Look where you will, you will not find another village like it."

"It is a lovely spot. Years have passed since I beheld it; a manhood of passion has succeeded the spring of boyhood; I have seen other lands, mixed with the world, formed other ties, but never forgot the streams in which I fished for the speckled trout, the fields where I wandered with my young companions."

He clasped his hands together as he spoke, and his eyes fell upon a small diamond ring which for more than twenty years had never been drawn from his finger; he had been poor, very poor, wanted bread even, shivered with the keen blast of winter, yet had the idea of parting with it never once entered his imagination. A thought seemed suddenly to strike him. Approaching the man who came from the same neighbourhood as himself, he abruptly asked if he might speak with him alone.

"Had you not better see the chaplain?" said the poor fellow, uneasily.

"No; he would not understand me."

"How, then, shall I?"

"Because you have the same recollections, the same sympathies as myself. Tell me, do you ever visit Sedburg?"

"Every year."

"Is it near your time of going there?"

"Within a month or so."

"I must speak with you," exclaimed the wretched man, with more energy than he had yet evinced. "You have it in your power to render my last moments tranquil, if not happy. Will you deny me?"

"I tell you beforehand it will be useless," replied the turnkey. "I can do nothing to assist you to escape. If I had the will I have not the means. I am sorry for you, but I know my duty, and am not to be tempted."

"Nor do I wish to tempt you," urged the prisoner. "It is but to execute a commission for me after I am dead."

"Oh, that is a very different affair, and if ——"

Here the speaker looked at his brother officer, as if to ask his sanction. The man, whose curiosity was excited, and who doubted not but his companion would relate every thing to him, gave him a wink, as much as to say "all right."

"This way," said Faddle, drawing the fellow by the hand to the remotest part of the cell, and speaking in a whisper, as if fearful the very walls should overhear him; "you say you come from Sedburg?"

"Yes."

"May I ask your name?"

"Peter Hurl."

The half-suppressed shriek which broke from the prisoner startled the two turnkeys. Long watching had made them nervous, a condition which the conversation and conduct of the prisoner not a little tended to increase. It was some moments before Faddle recovered his self-possession sufficiently to resume the subject which lay nearest his heart.

"Peter," he said, "do you know in the minster-yard a plain turf grave, distinguished only by a rose tree, remarkable for its size and beauty?"

"Ay," replied the man gazing upon the speaker, as if he were trying to trace in the hard-worn features of the man the portrait of some one he had known as a boy. "I know it well. I also knew," he added, "the good, kind girl who sleeps beneath it."

"You ought to recollect her," observed the criminal, sadly, "for she was kind to you and yours."

"In the name of God, who are you?"

"No matter," resumed Faddle; "I have round my neck a foolish toy, placed there when I was a boy, a happy, thoughtless boy, dreaming of love, long years of bliss, honour, and such vain hopes as youth deludes us with. It is a locket, and contains two braids of hair, my own and ——"

"Ellen Mayfield's," groaned the man.

"Even so. I would not, when I am dead, the hangman's hand should pollute the trees shorn from her angel-head. Take them, and promise me on your return to bury them 'neath the rose tree. This ring," he added, drawing the diamond from his finger, "is not of great value, but it will repay you for your trouble."

"I will," said the man, in a voice broken by emotion. "Oh! Master Francis, Master Francis! a hundred times have I wondered what had become of you. Little did I ever think to find you here."

"Thanks," said Faddle, without taking the slightest notice of the recognition. "Hark! I have not much time to lose."

The clock struck the hour of three.

He drew the locket—which was one of plain gold, suspended to a black ribbon—from his neck, and placed it in the hands of the turnkey.

"And there," he added, "is the ring."

"I don't want it," exclaimed the man, bursting into tears. "Misfortune has made me a gaoler—a turnkey; but I have a heart. Oh! Master Francis, do you think I require a bribe to do you a service?"

"The executioner will not be so scrupulous," urged the prisoner.

"Let him have it, then," said Peter Hurl; "the very sight of it would be a reproach to me."

"It was my mother's, Peter, and ought not to fall into such hands."

The gaoler no longer refused the token, but received it as a memorial of one he was bound to venerate and respect.

"Tell me," he whispered, "is there nothing more I can do for you to show my gratitude to your dear mother's memory?"

"Nothing."

"Let me send for the chaplain; it is not too late to think of your soul! Master Francis, think on your soul! Oh! you had always a proud, stern nature."

"To you, Peter?" demanded the prisoner, reproachfully.

"Not to me! oh, not to me! I were a dog to say ," replied the turnkey.

"Well, then," resumed Faddle, with a smile, for he regained all his firmness and self-possession, "promise me two things. Fear not," he added, "they will not compromise your duty."

"I do, Master Francis, I do."

"Swear it."

"By heaven!" said the man, "and may I never see if I break my oath!"

"Enough; first not to reveal, no matter how pressed, or by whom, to the sheriff's chaplain, or to any human being, my name, or any thing that can give a clue to my history."

"They shall tear me to pieces first, and then I would keep the secret: there was no occasion to exact an oath for that. The next?"

"One shake of the hand," said the criminal, firmly, "and not one word more."

"But I——"

"Your oath," whispered Faddle, extending his hand.

The gaoler, with a desperate resolution, shook it suddenly, and returned to the place where his astonished comrade was watching their interview.

"Well," said the senior, "has he confessed any thing?"

"No."

"Told you any thing?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"A secret."

"From me?"

"From all the world."

"You have met him, then, before?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Before he was a felon, or I a turnkey; and now for the present ask me no more questions. I have had enough of horror for one night—more, and I should go mad, quite mad."

The interview between the two men, who had not met since they were boys, had produced a different effect upon the minds of each; for while Peter Hurl was excited to a fearful degree, the condemned man, on the contrary, was calmed and soothed by it. Still he gave no outward signs of repentance, but continued as before to pace the floor of the cell till the arrival of the chaplain. Who shall presume to judge or say what passed in the breast of the guilty man during the hours which intervened, or measure the time necessary for a soul to reconcile itself to its Creator? To the wisest of us it is but a mystery. Let human reason pause ere it pronounces.

One thing at least was certain—that the culprit's manner was considerably changed; although cold and uncommunicative as ever, it was no longer sceptical and sneering.

"Will you permit me to pray with you?" demanded the clergyman, who was delighted at the change in Faddle's manner.

"No," was the quiet reply.

"Infidel to the last?"

"Not so," replied the culprit; "but my last prayer on earth is said; human justice claims me now, and to that I resign myself."

By the time that the prisoner had made his toilette and drank a cup of coffee, the sheriffs, attended by the governor and executioner, entered the cell. No change was visible on the countenance of Faddle at the sight of the executioner, whom he instantly recognised, as he had seen him officiate at the execution of Hawk.

He was asked if he wished to proceed first to the chapel, but he declined.

"Have you any thing to declare?" demanded the sheriff.

"Nothing."

"No confession to appease offended Justice?" inquired his brother functionary.

"My debt to Justice, Mr. Sheriff," coolly replied the prisoner, "will soon be paid. The composition is a handsome one. She need not grumble."

At a look from the sheriff, the executioner advanced. Faddle had previously removed his cravat and turned his shirt-collar down. No sooner did he perceive the intention of the last functionary of the law, than he quietly advanced half way to meet him, placed his arms in the proper position, and turned round to be pinioned.

"A cool hand," muttered the sheriff to his brother officer.

The hangman thought as much, only he did not venture to speak his thoughts aloud. At this moment the governor asked the prisoner if he would like a glass of wine before proceeding to the fatal beam.

It was quietly declined.

The signal was given, and the procession moved on. As it left the cell, the prisoner's eyes were fixed to the last upon Peter Hurl, who, pale as death, stood watching the departure of his early friend.

"Remember!" said Faddle, aloud.

"Remember what?" demanded the chaplain, startled at the word.

A smile passed over Faddle's lips as a glance of the turnkey assured him he was understood.

A large party were assembled in the press-room and passages along which the prisoner had to pass consisting of members of the press, romance writers studying for horrors, fashionables in search of excitement, and personal friends of the sheriffs. Although many present were well known to the prisoner, he took no notice either by word or look that he recognised them. He walked firmly on till he reached the fatal beam, under which he quietly placed himself, and gazed upon the sea of heads below.

"What a crowd!" he quietly observed to the executioner.

The man was so unnerved by the observation that he trembled.

"Be cool," continued the culprit, "as you will put me perhaps to unnecessary pain; give the rope a little more fall, and don't draw the cap over my eyes till the last."

It was with difficulty the hangman had sufficient nerve to complete his fatal office. All was at last prepared, and the victim to offended Justice stood alone upon the scaffold.

The next minute the bolt was withdrawn, and a writhing body swung in the air.

Five minutes later, the sheriffs and their friends were seated at a comfortable breakfast table, discussing the details of the execution.

About two months after the scene we have described, Peter Hurl, the turnkey, took his annual trip to Sedbury, and, mindful of his promise to the dead, sought the grave o'ershadowed by a rose tree, which Faddle had described. Carefully did he remove a portion of the turf and mould, and place the locket and ribbon in the grave. Just as he concluded his task, the old grey-haired sexton arrived; like most sextons, he was the gossip of the village, the chronicler of the dead, the historian of families for miles round.

"Ah!" said the old man, as he recognised Peter; "come to take a walk in the churchyard, to have a look at the grave of your old friends?"

"Even so," said Peter; "but tell me," he added

"who pays you for keeping Miss Ellen's rose-tree and grave in such trim order? I thought all her friends were dead."

"All her relations are," observed the old man; "so they do not."

"That's not an answer."

"It's the best I can give."

"How so?" demanded Peter,

"Because I never knew. All I can tell you is, that every year, as regularly as Christmas comes, ever since her death, I have received through the post office, sometimes from London and sometimes from foreign parts, a letter with a sovereign, with these words written in the bit of paper round the coin :—'For keeping up Ellen Mayfield's grave.'"

"And have you no idea who sent it?"

"None. Have you?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"One who will never more put hand to paper, whose troubles and passions are alike at rest. You will never receive another sovereign from the same quarter."

"Well, then," said the sexton, "I'll keep the grave up out of gratitude for the past."

Peter Hurl prophesied truly—the old man never did receive another sovereign, but he kept his word as long as he lived. The grave was kept up in Sedburg churchyard.

THE END.

TO OUR READERS.

With this Number "The Mysteries of London, Lights and Shadows of London Life," is brought to a conclusion. The proprietor of the Work takes this opportunity of expressing his thanks to the Public for the continued patronage they have extended to the Series of Tales published under the above title. On Saturday Next, the 14th instant, a New Romance, in the same style, and printed in the same form, as "The Mysteries of London," will be commenced, and issued weekly, under the title of

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